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THE BRITISH DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPH AS A MEDIUM
OF INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA DURING THE SECOND
WORLD WAR 1939 - 1945

05933009

by Charles Craig AIIP MSIAD ARPS ACP

A Thesis to be submitted to the Council for National
Academic Awards (Committee for Art and Design Research
Sub-Committee) for the Degree of Master of Philosophy.

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July, 1982

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Charles Craig
Barnet, Herts.

July, 1982

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ABSTRACT

The use of the documentary photograph as a means of recording war and human conflict is widely accepted, yet rarely analysed in terms of the evidence such images claim to portray. Existing studies have been directed towards the photograph as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end in a broader context.

This Thesis will trace the development of the documentary movement in outline, expanding in depth when referring to the British involvement within the tradition during the Second World War. The centrality of the Thesis will rest upon the need to discern between the actuality photograph as evidence when framed or presented within persuasive and propaganda terms, and the record photograph which informs and illustrates by factual content alone. Parallel to this study will be an analysis of the control and censorship process by which photography was disseminated within the media of the period when employed as an instrument reflecting governmental concerns in matters of national morale and the maintenance of social cohesion. Such official considerations have affected the contemporary use of photographs, which in retrospect have created discrepancies and anomalies in our appreciation of chronological sequences of events and military enterprises. Furthermore, such propaganda constraints have been instrumental in the creation of personas - and the myths that often surround them - both in terms of context and historical perspective.

A methodology will be offered by which these tensions of control and censorship allied to the documentary tradition may be demystified, so that both the propaganda and record photograph can be assessed not only in their original contemporary context, but as sources of historical data and information.

Chapter One - Early Developments

Early perceptions concerning the role of photography were as confused as the divergent paths that led to the discovery of the medium itself. Two primary streams of development quickly asserted themselves, however, among the serious practitioners of photography, and have subsequently formed the basis for expansion and diversification. These could be termed 'truth-telling' and 'beautification'¹ - the first having a moral and literary pedigree, the latter originating from within the fine-art traditions and practice of the period. The first of these - aptly termed 'record photography' by Professor Margaret Harker² - grew from the early pre-occupation of photographers with topographical subjects. The Victorians were eager to see those aspects of life and culture which, prior to the evolution of photography, had merely been represented ambivalently through the written or spoken word, or in the representations of illustrators or artists. From this enthusiastic application of photography as a recording medium, there emerged the expedition and travel photographers, typified by Francis Frith.⁷ Encumbered by the bulk of the equipment then in use, Frith made three expeditions to Egypt and the Near East between 1856 and 1860, and photographed anything that interested him. His photographs were published in book-form, and being produced prior to the advent of the half-tone reprographic process, were virtually albums of photographic prints in a bound format. The general approach of such travel photographers was matched in the more specialised areas of photographic application. Victorian engineering feats were assiduously recorded, and typical of the thoroughness with which

projects were undertaken was the concern of the London and North Western Railway, from 1865 onwards, to photograph an example of each class of locomotive built at Crewe Works.³

The earliest photographers were well aware that the medium offered tremendous possibilities of fidelity and accuracy in rendition of subject matter, but viewed this capacity as a recording facility inherent within the medium itself rather than as a means by which the camera might become a 'documentary tool'.

In the work of British photographers in the first half of the 19th century, there is ample evidence of the camera being used to record and document the details of technical progress. For example, P. H. Delamotte photographed the erection of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham in South London each week from 1851 to 1854, and the resulting collection of photographs were published in two volumes. Such methodical recording typifies the mid-Victorian approach in Britain to the deliberate use of the photographic image as a source of information and evidence. Whilst Delamotte was using the camera to record objects primarily, his contemporaries were investigating the use of photography in areas of human concern. Dr Hugh Welch Diamond used photography to investigate the problems of mental illness - he was resident superintendant at Surrey County Asylum from 1848 until 1858 - and displayed an objective yet concerned attitude towards the use of photography of a medium of human recording and examination. He was a great humanitarian, and in his lifetime did much to propagate and advance the use of photography as an objective, yet compassionate medium of social record and observation.

The emergence of a clear sense of social awareness among British photographers in the middle decades of the 19th century is

hard to discern, yet in the work of Thomas Annan can be seen the fundamental awakenings of a social conscience which could utilise the camera as a persuasive instrument for 'truth-telling'. In 1868, Annan began to record the slums of Glasgow in Scotland for the Glasgow City Improvement Trust. His contribution to photography is described by Gail Buckland in the book Reality Recorded in these terms:

His documentation is an outstanding example of the use of the camera as a social weapon. Although many of the photographs do not have people in them, Annan realised the impact the pictures would have if there was a person peering out of a doorway, in a passageway, or in a close. Annan's photographs convey a kind of sadness - the sadness that people had to live in such appalling conditions. These photographs linger in one's mind, for they show a reality that only the camera could preserve.⁴

Whilst Annan was very much an observer - as distinct from a crusading social reformer armed with a camera - he nevertheless had a clear sense of social injustice, and used his professional skills and talents to make a record of the poverty and decay he saw around him. In the work of British photographers such as Annan and his contemporaries, the foundations were established for a later emergence of a socially-motivated use of photography.

Such methodical visual cataloguing of the early and mid-Victorian era is perhaps the clearest example of the 'truth-telling' approach. During an address to a Camera Club conference of the Society of Arts on March 26th, 1889, Peter Henry Emerson, a leading art-photographer of the day, drew his audience's attention to this:

.It is, we think, because of the confusion of the aims of Science and Art that the majority of photographs fail either as scientific records or pictures. It would be easy to point out how the majority are false scientifically, and easier still to show how they are simply devoid of all artistic qualities. They serve,

however, as many have served, as topographical records of faces, buildings, and landscapes, but often incorrect records at that. It is curious and interesting to observe that such work always requires a name. It is a photograph of a 'Mr Jones', of 'Mont Blanc', or of the 'Houses of Parliament'. On the other hand, a work of art really requires no name - it speaks for itself. It has no burning desire to be named, for its aim is to give the beholder aesthetic pleasure, and not to add to his knowledge of the science of places, i.e. topography. The work of Art, it cannot too often be repeated, appeals to a man's emotional side; it has no wish to add to his knowledge - to his science.⁵

In this lecture, the conflict between Art and Science was obviously causing Emerson some concern, and was felt to be a matter worthy of public discussion and debate. Emerson's stern attitude was a reflection of his commitment to the photographic arts, and this second stream of photographic activity - 'beautification' - originated within the pictorial tradition of contemporary fine-art and painting practice, which was accepted by many early photographers with enthusiasm. As many of the English photographers had been painters it is understandable that they should endorse this form of representation and David Octavius Hill, O.J. Rejlander, and Henry Peach-Robinson all attempted to reproduce the quality inherent in the painted image in their work. Eventually this evolved into a more photographically orientated approach, reaching its apogee in the formation of 'The Linked Ring' in 1892. This was a Victorian brotherhood of photographers who were all dedicated to the furtherance of photography in many artistic forms and directions, but united in their objective of making photography recognised and accepted as a serious art-form.⁶

Such concepts of 'truth telling' and 'beautification' became evident in the work of Roger Fenton. Fenton was the son of a wealthy

land and cotton-mill owner and, having graduated from University College, London, with a Masters degree, studied painting with Paul Delaroche in Paris. Paradoxically, upon his return to London, he studied law, practising as a solicitor from 1852 to 1854. However, during this period, his amateur enthusiasm for photography became a dominant factor in his life, following his early involvement in the formation of the Photographic Club in 1847 (as one of twelve amateur Calotypists) and his being appointed the first honorary secretary of the Photographic society.

During this period, Fenton's photography displayed all the influence of his art-training, being formally composed and structured, whether the subject matter was architectural, topographical, or still-life in nature. His work and reputation elicited interest from Prince Albert about this time, and in 1852, Fenton was "summoned by Queen Victoria to record intimate domestic scenes of the royal family".⁷ This initial level of royal patronage was to have later ramifications upon his career and reputation, but his resulting prints from this commission were received with "awe and wonder". At this period in his work, Roger Fenton offers a glimpse of the many paradoxes that were to affect the evolution of photography as a 'truth-telling' medium. An archetypal Victorian gentleman, Fenton studied photography with the exuberance and enthusiasm perhaps only to be found in the true amateur of that era. Whilst practising his craft free from considerations of audience or application, he was able to utilise his formal painting training to create a disciplined approach to his photography. His images from the late 1840s and early 1850s fall very much into the 'beautification' genre of this period - luscious still-life groups of fruit and flowers, exquisitely composed groups of Highland ghillies

and retainers, and great quantities of formally perfect prints of art treasures from the British Museum. Fenton's concepts - and their realisation - are all couched within fine-art traditions of the period in their feelings for texture, richness, and beauty of formal composition.

All this was to change, when in 1854 the British army was committed to action in the Crimea against the forces of Imperial Russia with the support of France, her ally in the venture. To quote Albert Leventhal - "The Allied side was marked by truly massive incompetence, bumbling direction by the High Command combined with breakdowns and failures by the commissariat".⁸ Such levels of military inadequacy were a betrayal of the belief of Queen Victoria and her ministers that the war was a popular one, and when the news of its conduct reached the public through the reporting of the accredited correspondents such as William Howard Russell of The Times, the impact was considerable. Writing which described the British army as "...a drop of miserable, washed out, worn out, spiritless wretches who muster out of 55,000 just 11,000 now fit to shoulder a musket" aroused hostility amongst the military establishment, and embarrassed the government of the day.⁹ Despite threats to his person issued with 'understated menace', Russell persevered, and in the end, his reports helped to bring down the government of Lord Aberdeen in January 1855. Following this event, some reforms were instituted to rectify the worst excesses of the earlier incompetence.

It was at this juncture that "someone in the establishment, possibly Prince Albert, realised that to restore public confidence in the conduct of war some form of counter-propaganda was necessary, and what better form could there be than the medium that never lies - the

camera".¹⁰ Accordingly, in March 1855, Roger Fenton was sent on commission to the Crimea, and sponsored by Prince Albert with letters of introduction, arrived at Balaclava on March 8th of that year. Fenton was already compromised by the bias of his commission to present an alternative view of the war and its conduct to that presented by Russell. He was further constrained by political and military exigencies, and his social background militated against his taking a radical or critical stance. It was therefore predictable that on his arrival in the Crimea he would perpetuate his craft with traditional dexterity, and his formal group portraits exhibited a quality that has led Professor Margaret Harker to claim "that nobody has ever photographed groups of people as well as Roger Fenton".¹¹ Such skills inevitably created a partial view of the war, no doubt encompassed by his Royal support, so that Fenton's images portray a tidy war, made up of empty landscapes, posed groups of gentlemen officers, and atmospheric, semi-romantic vistas of ships at anchor. That Fenton himself came across the aftermath of war is not in doubt, as he wrote:

We came upon many skeletons half-buried. One was lying as if he had raised himself upon his elbow, the bare skull sticking up with still enough flesh left in the muscles to prevent it falling from the shoulders.¹²

Why Fenton did not photograph such scenes remains unclear. Professor Harker intimates that there might well have been editing prior to the work being exhibited, and that such editing might not have exclusively been of Fenton's choice - but all things considered, perhaps Philip Knightley's terse assessment is nearer the final reality. In referring to such scenes as that encountered by Fenton:

Fenton did not bother to unpack his camera. He knew the sort of photograph he should take, and this was not one of them. Fenton and Russell never worked together, and Fenton, having finished his assignment, returned to England to collect the royal praise he felt he deserved.¹³

To criticise Fenton too harshly in retrospect does not do him, or his work, the credit it still deserves. We cannot be party to the exact circumstances surrounding the making of his Crimean war images, or know to what degree 'censorship' was imposed, or indeed, self-imposed. Fenton was a craftsman, working with difficult and bulky equipment in inhospitable surroundings. The production of a well-coated collodion plate was in itself an achievement under the conditions of the time, and considerations of the coverage open and accessible to him remain debatable to this day. We can only discuss the visual legacy that his work has left us, and it still provides a worthwhile visual document of the war in certain respects, without which our knowledge of the period would certainly be weaker.

The most important aspect of this first British involvement in the photography of war lies in the methodology established which was to be repeated in later conflicts. In the work of Roger Fenton, and the context within which it was commissioned, realised, and presented, a misappropriation of the photographic image can already be traced. The veracity of the photograph was already being utilised for political and military expediency, and the conduct of the photographer at this early juncture was being influenced by issues far broader than the taking of photographs alone. The singular nature of the Crimean War, and the manner in which British involvement in the photography of war can so readily be identified ensures that it remains an early indicator for later, and more complex conflicts.

In the work of Roger Fenton and his contemporaries in the Crimea, and of Matthew Brady in the American Civil War ten years later, the camera established its credentials as a component of 19th century warfare, but its role remained ambiguous and ill-defined. Emasculated in the Crimea to the function of a distant witness - as much by Fenton's Victorian upper-class social attitudes as by any considerations of propaganda - the camera satisfied the limited expectations of a small audience to whom the photographs were eventually addressed. In America, the more realistic and journalistic approach of Matthew Brady, Alexander Gardner, and Timothy O'Sullivan remained understated by the inability of the technical reprography of the period to offer their images to a mass-circulation readership, further hampered by editorial attitudes more attuned to the highly dramatized approach of the war-artists, illustrators, and 'on the spot' correspondents. At this stage of development in photography, action pictures of the hanging of rebels in 1864 lacked the 'pace' of contemporary writing and illustration. Given all these shortcomings, certain national and cultural traits were already becoming apparent in the attitudes and approaches being adopted, which later became more clearly defined as the medium and its practitioners became more assured and competent. In the British participation, the class and formed social structure already determined the type of person who would be making the photographs, and the gentleman-photographer typified by Fenton could move with relative ease amongst his contemporaries of equal social rank. In America, the less-established social order allowed for greater licence of operation and access, and freed from some of the social mores in Britain that militated against the use of a camera, the 'unlettered' Matthew Brady was not hampered

by his lack of social grace or background in the pursuit of his endeavours. Even in their mode of operation, such differences might be discerned - Fenton with his two assistants, under royal patronage, moved with care and deliberation about the Crimea, making aesthetic judgements in all his work, whilst Matthew Brady recruited a group of paid, hired cameramen to do his work for him on a broad basis, still insisting in entrepreneurial fashion that he received the credit for their efforts.

The social status of the Victorian photographer in Britain was being formed as a result of cultural and commercial pressures and commitments which could no longer be denied. The war activities of Fenton and Brady highlighted the national character of their practice, but in Britain and Europe other and more compelling constraints were now having their effect. In Britain, the elite of the photographic world - of which Fenton was a good example - came from educated backgrounds and were financially secure. They were able to view the medium of photography as an art or recreational pastime, freed from any financial or commercial pressures. The emergence of the Daguerrotype as a marketable commodity in the late 1840s created a different approach by those who viewed the product as a commercial enterprise worthy of attention and were typified by the studio of Richard Beard in Cavendish Square.¹⁴ In establishments such as this, the Daguerrotype was marketed as a metallic image miniature object, often beautifully mounted and presented, with the sitter as the client, seen as a source of financial income on a purely commercial basis. Beard, in his approach to both photography and finance, displayed facets of what we now recognise as professional practice, and laid the foundations for the development of the

commercial portrait photographer. Such commercial enterprises had different criteria by which they measured their success or failure and so created their own institutions and assumptions that persist to this day. Concepts of the photograph as an art-object were being challenged by the concept of photography as a commercial product with a broader audience and market than the gallery visitor or the art connoisseur.

With the development of the collodion wet-plate process, and the Ambrotype and Calotype, the portrait studios enjoyed great popularity, and by 1866, there were over 280 studios in the London area alone catering to the demand for 'photographic likenesses'. In this enormous growth of commercial photography the impetus for progress was in the promotion and marketing of photography rather than in the treatment and application of the medium as an expressive art form.

If the concepts of the 'artist-photographer' and the 'professional photographer' can be traced in such mid-Victorian developments, the medium was further expanded upon - some contemporary figures in fact said debased - by the first exploitative use of the medium in the production of the photographic cartes-de-visites. This popular use of the medium first emerged in the mid-1850s, and took the form of a photographic print measuring some 2 1/4 x 3 1/2 inches mounted on card, often with the photographer's name or studio printed on the reverse. Such was the popularity of these items that, as the demand grew, the standard of photography was often reduced to the barely acceptable, many of the resulting images being trite and dull, the result of the camera being handled without flair or imagination by an assistant or operator working to constraints of time and cost. Such photographs were often devoid of the professional attention

lavished in the salon-style portrait studios of the great cities - a direct legacy of the purely commercial motivation that led to the production of the cartes-de-visites. In such an enterprise, where the purveying of images became the rationale for the activity, photography became a trade rather than a profession, in which mass-production techniques dictated the quality, style, and format of the photographic image. Because the sheer quantity of the cartes produced was enormous, the unit cost became relatively low and so at least the venture's popularity brought it within the reach of a far broader social spectrum than the formal portrait studios. Many examples of this hybrid activity survive, often bound into family albums, and later specimens feature the emerging merchant classes rather than the aristocracy or men of letters. Every small county town or industrial city now had its own studio, and the later years of the 1880s and 1890s saw a continuation of the earlier practice as the dry-plate processes reduced even further the cost of such a service.

Such developments took place before the mass distribution of the photograph via the printed page had occurred, and represent the medium's ability to create its own hierarchy and social structure even though the images were purely camera-originated. Although the published photograph in terms of ink-on-paper did not exist in the early 1880s, it was in that decade that the entry of photography in a broad public domain took place, and during which many of the institutions and assumptions surrounding the published photography became established. The tradition of the salon exhibition, perhaps first implemented when the Photographic Society held its first display of some 1500 photographs in London in 1854, was already an established format for the viewing of photographic images. The 1860s saw the

growth of the studio as a professional and trade activity, with the result that many homes had photographs in them, and the visual currency of the photograph became an accepted part of everyday life for a wider part of the population. The 1870s was a decade in which industrial growth consolidated earlier inventions and discoveries in science and engineering, and during which the British Empire expanded its trade and merchant links. Previous to this time, any attempts at utilising the photograph in a book had to resort to hand-originated photoprints, either using platinum prints, oil-pigment processes, Ambrotypes or Calotypes. The Woodburytype process offered an early compromise in terms of fidelity and quantity for the publishing of volumes of photographs,¹⁵ but it was the advent of the photo-gravure process in the 1880s that made it possible for the photograph to be printed and distributed to a general audience without quality loss, whilst reducing overall publishing costs. Many art-photographers reacted with enthusiasm to the potential of the new process - P.H. Emerson actually claimed that the gravure process was an accurate reprographic system in which the technical integrity of the original photograph was unimpaired.¹⁶ This was evidenced in his superbly-crafted photographs of this period in volumes such as Pictures of East Anglian Life and Wild Life on a Tidal Water which, utilising the gravure process, appeared in 1888 and 1890 respectively.

The gravure process brought the concept of the photographer as an artist and craftsman to its apogee in the 1890s - partly through the international membership and reputation of the brotherhood of 'The Linked Ring' - but primarily because for a few short years, the combination of the art of photography and the craft of gravure-printmaking secured control of the medium both in origination and

dissemination. In this late flowering of 19th century creative photography, the earlier processes of gum-bichromate printing and other silver-salt techniques had not been rejected, and great attention was paid to the craft of quality rendition, into which the 'handmade' gravure print could be absorbed. 'The Linked Ring' photographers believed that the hand-crafted photographic image was in itself a work of art due to such a craft base, and the highly developed level of technical control and expertise needed to produce these images was greatly respected. All this was to disappear as soon as the dissemination of the photograph passed from the hands of the photographer or master-printer to the photo-mechanical printing presses of the early 20th century. Immediately the photograph became a means to an end rather than an end in itself, the image became far more than just a picture; it became mass communication.

Early evidence of this dimension of photography already existed in the latter of the 19th century. The Victorians viewed the camera not only as an art-instrument, but as a recording tool, and took it upon themselves to develop this aspect of the medium with great enthusiasm. From the earliest days of photography, the camera became an accessory to any expedition or grand tour, and accompanied by the Victorians' insatiable thirst for knowledge, reached a far wider audience than might be imagined through the devices of the lantern-slide projector and the stereoscopic viewer. By the utilisation of such technical advances, the photograph became an educational and entertainment medium, in which the wonders of the world could be presented in the living room of many a Victorian villa. Topographical subjects formed the bulk of such collections, typified perhaps by the work of Samuel Bourne, who, in 1863, produced a series

of mountain photographs in the Himalayas, often at heights of over 15000 feet under extreme conditions of cold and discomfort.¹⁷ By such endeavours, Victorian photographers were able to produce visual evidence concerning the topography and habitat of the planet in which they lived, so bringing to life for a broader audience scenes of foreign lands, races, and customs which previously had almost been in the nature of fables. By offering such insights, the photographers expanded the base of their medium into areas of education and public knowledge with far wider implications than the mere documenting of reality through the camera lens.

With the introduction of the portable Kodak Box Camera by George Eastman in America in 1888, photography was brought within the reach of a far broader public. The camera was liberated from the art and science debates of the preceding forty years and became an instrument of recreation and amusement. With the slogan 'You push the button, we do the rest', Eastman brought marketing to photography, and provided the basis for the amateur market which has flourished ever since that time. Despite initial reservations, such as those voiced in the Weekly Times and Echo in 1893, which applauded the formation of a "Vigilance Association with the purpose of thrashing cads with cameras who go about in seaside places taking snapshots of ladies emerging from the deep",¹⁸ the snapshot camera became enormously popular, and attracted much affection from its users as a method by which the happier moments of their lives might be recorded. The facility of the snapshot camera to provide a personal and private record of daily life remains a largely untapped source of visual evidence for social historians, and it is only within the last decade or so that the value of the family and photographic album as an

unwitting social document has begun to be appreciated. With the marketing of this simple box camera, photography was brought into the hands of the people, and no longer could the production of a photograph be restricted to the artist, professional, or well-endowed gentleman. Photography had become common property, available to anyone who wished to make use of it.

Finally, the development of a reliable half-tone reprographic process in 1880-1892 by Horgan in America, and Meisenbach in Germany ensured the future of photography as a medium by which images of fidelity and accuracy might be placed before a mass audience. As early as October, 1883, a half-tone photographic reproduction appeared in the German periodical Illustrierte Zeitung using a Meisenbach autotype block, and further developments in print processes and equipment led to the use of the photograph in the British daily press. The Daily Mirror issue of 7th January, 1904, demonstrated that henceforth it would exclusively utilise photography for illustration wherever possible, with the implication that the concept of photography as a medium of mass information and persuasion had now become a reality. As photography entered into the general public consciousness in this way, further applications within the field of magazine publication were developed. As early as 1896, the magazine Paris-Moderne introduced entire issues built around photographic essays on life in Paris, and two years later, La Vie au Grand Air also featured narrative photography, but with the addition of dynamic picture layouts and graphic design. Of this period, the Swedish critic Rune Hassner writes:

In the early decades of the 1900s the advances being made in methods of reproduction as well as in printing techniques, along with increasingly rapid and more regular movements of pictures via the new means of transportation and communication of the era - express

trains, and fast trans-Atlantic steamers, dirigibles, and airplanes, as well as the picture-telegraph - contributed to a marked increase in the volume of pictures in the daily press and to a definite establishment of the photographic picture story in weekly magazines.¹⁹

In such uses of photography in the magazine and newspaper press of the 1900s, the mass dissemination of photography in the public domain was finally realised. Such an achievement was primarily based upon the technological revolution in transport and communication referred to by Hassner, rather than being a self-initiated movement in its own right. As educational standards improved, the public came to expect and demand more information about the world in which they lived, and photography provided a form of visual shorthand by which such ambitions might be fulfilled. Allied to parallel advances in journalistic practice and reprographic technology, the printed photograph offered a palatable form by which this information transmission could be achieved. There were few pressing social needs or humanitarian concerns behind these developments, yet photography became emancipated from the craft and fine-art constraints of the past seventy years. Whilst, previously, the photograph had been an art object or a topographical record, now it could become a vehicle for information, comment, and even persuasion.

Although in the early 1900s such a potential had yet to be realised and fulfilled, the facility now existed for those who wished to use the camera as an instrument of social concern to do so - and it was in this area of photographic application that further developments were to take place.

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4. Gail Buckland, Reality Recorded (1974) p.79
5. Nathan Lyons, Photographers on Photography (1966) p.64
6. See Professor Margaret Harker, The Linked Ring (1980)
7. Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, The Magic Image (1975) p.44
8. Albert Leventhal, War (1973) p.12
9. Quoted by Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty (1978) p.12
10. Ibid p.15
11. Professor Margaret Harker to author, 25th March 1980
12. Knightley, op.cit p.15
13. Ibid
14. See Gus Macdonald, Camera-Victorian Eyewitness (1979) p.22
15. For details, see Bruce Barnard, Photodiscovery (1980) p.249/261
16. Professor Margaret Harker, paper on 'The Photogravure as a Work of Art' to conference on 'The Published Photograph', London 21st June 1978
17. Macdonald, op.cit pp. 35/37
18. Ibid, quoted by Macdonald, p.57
19. Rune Hassner, Bilder for miljoner (1977) p.56

Chapter Two - The Published Photograph

The birth of the Daily Mirror as a popular tabloid newspaper not only made viable the practice of popular journalism, but ensured that photography would be part of such an evolution. In Britain, the trade of the press photographer was to emerge - the early photographers on the Daily Mirror such as Ivor Castle and the Grant Brothers, being the forerunners of a continuous and ever present aspect of newspaper and magazine illustration and journalism. Of this period, Ken Baynes has written:

In fact, the first uses of photography in the new large circulation newspapers was lacking in confidence and experience. It consisted mainly of stiff, formal portraits or similar material which was already well established as a form within photography. The early years display a fascinating effort to weld together these separate pieces of the jigsaw and demonstrate what must, quite literally, have been a struggle to realise the potential of the new medium which was coming, relatively quickly, into existence. The essence, of course, lay in not just using a picture as an illustration, but as a part of a story. Success required the adaptation of familiar styles of photography, and the adaptation of familiar styles of journalism, all in the context of new technologies and a new audience.¹

In the United States of America, although from a technological viewpoint certain parallels with developments in Britain might be drawn, social and cultural conditions imposed different pressures upon the evolution of photography as a medium of illustration and documentation. From the 1880s onwards, large numbers of immigrants had flocked to America from Europe, and by the early 1900s, industrial cities such as Chicago and New York were witness to conditions of gross social deprivation as a result of this immigrant influx over the past twenty years. Such conditions gave rise to reaction and concern among the more enlightened of the population, and it was following

pressures for social reform that the camera was taken up and utilised not only as an instrument of documentation and record, but as a method by which comment, criticism, and propaganda against such conditions might be realised. In this new format, the camera provided a framework from which in later years a documentary consciousness was to develop, eventually of international dimensions.

Jacob Riis (1849-1914) was a Dane who emigrated to America when he was 21, and who endured all the privations of the immigrant of that era. Riis was not a professional photographer as such. He trained as a journalist and saw the camera as a weapon to be turned upon the social injustices which he had himself experienced. In this sense, he was a social reformer armed with a camera - as distinct from a photographer who had developed a social conscience - and this emphasis distanced his approach, dedication, and commitment from the purely professional or fine-art photographers of the period. By the publication of his photographs in books such as The Children of the Poor in 1892, and the later printing of Children of the Tenements in 1903, Riis fostered attempts to improve the social conditions of the working and immigrant communities, and viewed today, his photographs remain an indictment of man's cruelty to man.

Riis's work was paralleled, and then expanded upon, by that of Lewis W. Hine. Hine, who was born a native American in Wisconsin in 1874, used the camera as a way of exposing social deprivation, even to the extent that - in his own words - he wished his images to be viewed as 'documents of injustices'. His photographs of industrial workers in the slums of Chicago and Washington were indictments of the working conditions of that period, and in his later years, he was appointed staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee.

His earlier work is typified by his photographs of children working in factories and mines in the early 1900s and not only were his photographs a powerful comment upon the concept of child labour, but he also captioned his photographs with eloquent and startling information to heighten the effect of his images. Until his death in 1940, Hine used his camera tirelessly in his crusade against the social injustices of the period, and in his own words - "I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected: I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated".²

In combining text and photographs, with a clear sense of social purpose and intent, Hine moved his photography into the area of direct social propaganda. By so doing, he joined with Jacob Riis in expressing a sense of social concern, strengthened by an awareness that the camera was an instrument by which these social injustices could be seen and acted upon. In the work of these two American pioneers can be found the essence of what later emerged as the American documentary movement, now aided by the early mass-reprographic processes, and a developing sense of social awareness within the political and public sectors of the community.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 found both the United States and Britain at similar stages of evolution in terms of photography and the mass media of the period. The tabloid press was in existence in both countries, the use of the photograph within the newspapers and magazines of the day was commonplace, and the concept of the camera as an everyday instrument of recording facility was accepted. Despite such advances, the concept of documentary photography was still some fifteen years away. The photo-coverage of the First World War was compromised by considerations of national

propaganda and lack of experience in the handling of photography as an instrument of record and documentation in war. Only in applied areas of photography such as aerial reconnaissance was any progress made, and even this was hampered by military recalcitrance in accepting new technologies and processes. By the end of hostilities in 1918, photography had progressed little in terms of its social power and relevance, but had gained to a degree as a news medium, albeit firmly controlled by government and official organisations.

To cite and trace a British photographic involvement in the First World War merits consideration. This war consumed three million lives from the British Empire alone, and yet remains an ill-documented event in photographic terms. Unlike earlier, and more 'parochial' conflicts, the reasons for this may perhaps be easier to discern; for example, at the outbreak of hostilities, even war correspondents were not allowed near the front. Eventually, when they were granted limited access, they were 'escorted' by a conducting officer, whose main function was to ensure the correspondent saw as little as possible. For photographers, the position was even worse. As Phillip Knightley says:

Propaganda dates back 2,400 years, to Sun-tzu's The Art of War, but the First World War saw its first use in an organised, scientific manner. War correspondents were among its first victims.³

Initially no civilian photographer was allowed anywhere near the front combat zone - "the penalty for taking pictures was death".⁴ At the very beginning of the war, only two photographers, (both army officers), were accredited to cover the Western Front. Their remit was to record only, not to provide the newspapers with pictures.

The initial resistance to the concept of a 'combat photographer' persisted throughout the war on an official basis, and

yet there remains an enormous amount of material in the archives, both official and private. The Imperial War Museum alone holds some 100,000 negatives, many of which remain inadequately documented and captioned. It is this lack of documentation that denies this mass of material the historical validity it might otherwise enjoy, and makes sustained research of the collections such a difficult task. There are no formed collections of photographs. All that remains is a disjointed mosaic of images of varying quality, content, and scope. It is almost as though the sheer scale of the conflict overwhelmed the ability of a single photographer, or unit of photographers, to produce a cohesive set of photographs that presented an overview of the war.

A collection that merits some consideration is that of a little-known photographer, William Rider-Rider, who covered the Canadian section of Vimy Ridge in 1917, accredited as their photographer for that sector. He exposed some 4,000 5 ins x 4 ins glass negatives, which were forwarded to General Haig's headquarters for censorship, and then sent to London for distribution. Fortunately, after the war, he was able to retrieve this collection, and he took them to Canada, where they remain in the public archives. In this limited collection, at least some form of reference and continuity can be established, and some chronological sense made of the photographs themselves as documents. On the home front, there is one outstanding record for reference. Horace Nicholls - who had photographed the Boer War with such detached care - was appointed "official photographer for Great Britain"⁵ by the Department of Information from 1917 until 1918. In these two years, he travelled the country, photographing a range of subjects from wounded soldiers in wheelchairs outside Oxford colleges, to American troops passing through Winchester. His

outstanding set of photographs entitled Women at War are in the nature of formal portraits, group and individual, utterly revealing in their simplicity and grace.⁶ All the qualities in Nicholl's approach to photography when directed to such a project created photographs of great power and social relevance. When viewed today, they appear as fresh as ever, yet still provide an unrivalled source of evidence of one segment of British society under the conditions of war, yet they are not 'war photographs'. They are socially directed photographs produced in time of war, and it is as such that they should be viewed. In many ways they tell us more about the society of that period than the canonical rhetoric of the conventional trench photographs from the Western Front.

From the Crimean War, there emerged the work of Roger Fenton, and later, in the American Civil War, the names of Matthew Brady, Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan are well-known. Luigi Barzini and the Russo-Japanese conflict of 1904 have direct associations, likewise the work of Felice Beato in China, and John Burke in Afghanistan. The First World War offered no such names, nor did the work of any individual photographer become associated with the conflict. Perhaps the scale was too enormous and sustained, perhaps the role of the camera had yet to be clarified and accepted in such global terms, or more likely, other and more fundamental considerations emerged as a result of the international nature of the struggle which overwhelmed the photograph to the extent that it became an irrelevance. In Britain, there was an eventual determination that public opinion, attitudes, and matters of national morale would be directed by the authorities and government of the day. Primarily, this would relate to the control and issue of information, but the

ramifications were greater than this, and are discussed in the opening chapter of Cate Haste's book on First World War propaganda in these terms:

The First World War was the first total war. As it progressed, war ceased to be the prerogative solely of military leaders, and came to involve the civilians of all belligerent countries on a scale never known before. For the first time the barometer of public morale needed as much careful attention as the efficiency of the troops in the front line and this revolutionized attitudes to propaganda. It thrust the role of propaganda as a weapon into focus and gave it an importance it has retained ever since.⁷

When the photograph was placed in that context, it was no longer a print on light-sensitive paper, it had become part of a persuasive process in which photography was subsumed into a communication activity of far greater proportions. No longer could the photograph lay claim to 'authenticity', 'truth', or 'reality'. The importance of this shift in emphasis in the use of visual imagery in time of war - when placed in such a propaganda context - cannot be over-stated. In the First World War, greater reliance was placed upon the press, the poster, and the cartoon and illustration than upon the photograph. Perhaps this was because the photograph was still seen as being an expression of 'truth' or 'reality' rather than a representation, and that such qualities were viewed with suspicion by the authorities in their desire to create a manipulated concept of the war. Such reservations did not extend to the cinema, and the development of film.

As Cate Haste points out - "In the course of the war, and particularly under the Ministry of Information, the role of 'the pictures' changed from an instrument for the amusement of the masses into an instrument for the manipulation of the masses".⁸ That this

occurred at all may be traced to official attitudes towards the cinema and film. In the eyes of the government, film had little of the crusading fervour of the war-correspondent with which the camera had become associated, and at that date, the concept of news, or documentary film hardly existed. In this medium, therefore, the government saw a visual quality as yet uncluttered with problems of innuendo and criticism, and yet which had a popular cultural following. Although the government took their time in appreciating the power of film, by 1916, the "first major actuality film of the war" - The Battle of the Somme - was released in August, 1916.⁹ In the first two months, it received 2,000 bookings, and raised some £30,000 for military charities. The question this raises relates to why such a film received official support and public screening, whilst photographs of this battle were often suppressed along with the casualty figures.

A problem that repeatedly confounds serious research into photographs and their application in the First World War relates not only to their origination, but to their application and usage. As Lewinski states - "We do not know how the photographs were collected or distributed, nor who was accredited as an official photographer, nor whether officers were allowed to carry cameras as a matter of course".¹⁰ We know there were official photographers, but records of their work are incomplete, if they exist at all. If the problem of origination is difficult, then that is equalled by the lack of records relating to the manner in which they were used. Many of the records of the Department (later the Ministry) of Information were destroyed after the war, and searches in the Public Records Office in areas relating to photographs and photography are unrewarding. In an

article published in The Historical Journal, Michael Sanders had this to say concerning photography in the First World War:

The effect that actual war scenes could add to the printed word was unlimited. It was a prevailing assumption of the time that the camera could not lie, and from the very beginning Wellington House was faced with an insatiable demand....By September 1916 Wellington House was sending out 4,000 pictures a week.¹¹

What we do not know, and cannot trace, is exactly what such photographs illustrated, or what their content could have been. If the War Office was being so censorious, if photographs of Passchendaele were 'stopped' totally, and if only in July 1916, "an official photographer within the British Army was appointed",¹² where did all these photographs come from? The Imperial War Museum files are full of eminently forgettable photographs of endless lines of trenches, of large howitzers firing at nothing, and the propaganda value of such photographs would be in areas of counter-propaganda rather than in specific and considered use of the photograph. It appears that there was no clear understanding and appreciation of the power of the photograph other than as a possible threat to military morale - hence the Kitchener-originated ban on photographers at the front until 1915 - followed by a determined attempt to make the source and origin of photographs as obscure as possible after this date. The very diffuseness not only of the origins of the photographs themselves, but in the records kept (if any) of their application, and indeed, over those photographs which may have been banned, destroyed, or lost makes an accurate and objective evaluation of British photography in the First World War virtually impossible. The only level at which some assessment can be realised must be based on those photographs which still exist as a patchwork of the conflict, viewed almost as snapshots from a huge and unwieldy corporate family album.

In such terms, the legacy is more of an observation than a document. The equipment and hardware is well-covered - large railway-guns, battleships in line-ahead, fragile fabric-covered aeroplanes abound - and there are many aerial views to refer to and ponder over. The combat and action pictures are few, mostly the photographs are mud-scapes of one sort or another, of distant smoke-smudges on the horizon at Jutland, or of crashed aircraft or ruined churches and cathedrals. Yet in all these photographs, there is little sense of 'belonging', little outrage (that seems to have been left to the poets of the generation), even a lack of involvement. Again to quote Lewinski - "They have a descriptive clarity but very few show compassion or commitment on behalf of the photographer. They seem to be descriptive of something of which they are not really a part".¹³ To seek for documentary attitudes appears to be an unrewarding quest. Perhaps the medium had not yet evolved that level of discernment in its use; certainly, in terms of 'war photographs', the civilian population appears to be of little account even though much of Flanders and Picardy was taken away from them by the conflict. Although to modern viewers, the horrors of the mud, the disease, and the appalling attrition of the war comes through in photographs, they do so by their content alone, and not through any sense that the photographer was doing any more than recording such miseries. In that sense, the British contribution to photography in the First World War remains at best an enigma, and at worst, a dispassionate record.

In one area, however, almost contextual in its relevance, progress was made by the necessities of military expediency. Early in the war, the aircraft was viewed by the military as an aerial observation post, possibly of limited value as an artillery-spotting

weapon. However, as the intricacies of trench warfare developed, it became prudent for one side to watch and record the activities of the other. From this developed the concept of aerial photography, eventually to flourish as aerial reconnaissance. This development is summed up by Beaumont Newhall:

When peace was declared, the record was studied. The British reported that they had taken 6,500,000 photographs in the last year of combat; 1,300,000 more were taken in five months by American airplanes. Cameras, airplanes, processing equipment, and the specialized skill of photo-interpretation was brought to a new height. Photo-reconnaissance was established.¹⁴

Although such an apparently purely functional use of the camera might initially appear to be tangential to this discussion, its relevance will be endorsed later. Inherent in this growth was the acceptance that the camera was still, in concept at least, an accurate recorder of reality, and that referenceto it might provide data and information. The value of such 'reliable' objective photographs will be referred to again, but their early acceptance needs to be noted at this juncture. The Royal Navy - who had their own air-service - also developed the use of the airborne camera as 'the eyes of the Fleet', although not to the degree of the Royal Flying Corps.

The undeniable legacy of the First World War, and its relation to photography, lies in the growth and acceptance of propaganda. Although the use of the photograph was not as yet a developed skill in this arena, all the ingredients were there for later, and more sophisticated application. By the end of the conflict, there existed in the British Ministry of Information, a complex, and highly-refined organisation. The addition of a highly patriotic press, (typified by that of Lord Northcliffe), ensured that all the controls existed by which the national will might be maintained, and foreign propaganda

countered. The implications of this movement had a more direct relevance to photography in the later global conflict of 1939-1945, when such early control and censorship methods were once again referred to, and improved upon.

Following the end of the First World War, the popular press emerged as a potent force of mass communication and the photographer was very much part of this process. The press photographer of the 1920s and early 1930s was very much a 'tradesman', a supplier of images for immediate consumption. His background would have been the darkrooms of a newspaper, and his graduation would be through experience and demanding and poorly-paid work. His technique would be restricted to that demanded by the expediences of each assignment and the coarse-screen reprographic letterpress processes of newsprint. His camera would be large and bulky, using large-format negatives (9 cms x 12 cms was typical), and he would work to the concept of 'getting a picture'. If this could be achieved on a single sheet of film or glass-plate, all the better. None of this derides the dedication and technical expertise exhibited in the work of these press photographers, but it does identify how their sense of social concern was minimised by the demands of their employers, and how their cultural and educational background was not likely to induce a highly-developed sense of criticism. Typical of this style of photographer is James Jarche. Jarche worked throughout the 1920s and 1930s as a press photographer on both newspapers and magazines, covering virtually every event of national importance. His attitude to his work is discussed by an art historian, Ian Jeffrey writing in the guide to the Thirties Exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London in 1979 - during which, many of Jarche's press photographs could be viewed:

He catches no one out, uncovers no secrets; instead he seems to stand and watch with, and as, that audience.¹⁵

This implies a degree of detachment in Jarcho's photography throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s; yet this was probably self-protective rather than deliberate. Jarcho himself wrote about his experience when photographing in a coal-mine in Wales in 1934 in these words:

On my way back from the seam, I came upon a lunch-party. They were sitting stripped to the waist, their sweating faces blackened with grime. To them, it was amazing that any man in his sane senses should want to shoot anything as ordinary as themselves. To me, it was appalling that human beings should have to pass their days in such surroundings.¹⁶

However, his photographs from this session were published in the October 6th issue of Weekly Illustrated of the same year, and the captions were in no way critical, in fact they were quite bland:

Half a mile below the surface - having descended the mine, miners may have as much as a mile or two to tramp to reach the face they are working.¹⁷

Reading Jarcho's own book published in the 1930s, it is quite clear that he was aware of the social chasms that existed in British society at that period, but that he adopted the attitude that he was a photographer paid to get the photograph, and that was his overriding concern. Although there is little doubt that many press and news photographs have become documents of a historical nature, that was rarely the reason why they were commissioned.

The institutions and assumptions that governed press photography in Britain were mirrored in the United States. The press empires of Hearst and his peers in the America of the 1920s ensured a

monopoly of the tabloid press, and offered the public a sensationalist approach of which photography was very much a part. The sheer scale of the readership involved in the United States ensured a market for photographs not only through professional press and news photographers, but the coast-to-coast news agencies were always ready and able to use any material if it had enough news ('scoop') value. Disasters such as the explosion of the German airship 'Hindenburg' at Lakeside, New Jersey on May 7th, 1937 were covered by all press and news agencies in addition to the newsreel companies and freelance photographers and journalists. Out of the best-known photographs of this particular event was that taken by Murray Becker, an Associated Press staff-photographer who happened to be pointing his camera in the right direction at the right moment.¹⁸

Press and news photography in the United States and Britain in the immediate post-First World War period shared many common ingredients. The public in both countries were awakened to the world around them, and wanted information about it. Improved mass communications and transport facilitated the movement of people, and aided the rapid transmission of news and pictures through the developing techniques of wire-transmission and radio links. These demands created the need for immediate images for immediate consumption, and photography was ideally equipped to provide this service. It is not surprising, therefore, to find such a plethora of images from this period, which, whilst not conceived as documentary photographs, nevertheless provide us with a visual documentation of great breadth and variety.

Many of these images emanate from the recreational sphere of photography of the period. The snapshot tradition continued unabated,

aided by a marketing structure for processing and printing, with the simple box camera now being supplanted by simple folding cameras which were far more compact, yet cost little more than their predecessors. The growing popularity of outdoor recreational activities such as cycling and hiking encouraged the manufacture of such folding cameras which, whilst easy to carry when not in use, were more versatile in terms of focussing and lens quality than the rigid and more limited box camera. Some of these cameras were extremely basic to use, but the more developed forms produced by German companies like Voigtlander and Zeiss were extremely sophisticated, both optically, and in terms of versatility and overall performance. It is not surprising to find that the quality of snapshots from the late 1920s onwards reflects such technical improvements, with film emulsions and printing papers displaying further qualities of definition and permanence.

The introduction of the miniature 35mm camera in the early 1930s by the German companies of Leitz and Zeiss further expanded the amateur involvement in photography. Under the camera name of the Leica and Contax respectively, these German precision-made miniature cameras revolutionised photography, not only in terms of the instrument itself, but in the formation of attitudes towards the making and taking of photographs. No longer was the camera a bulky and unmanageable piece of hardware which the photographer (amateur or professional) had to endure, but it had been transformed into a small and compact optical instrument of great precision and accuracy which was capable of producing image fidelity of the highest quality. In the early years that such cameras were available, the pursuit of excellence in terms of image tonal rendition and fidelity blinded many amateur photographers to their real potential as candid, observational

instruments, but this soon passed. Such cameras opened up new vistas of travel and expedition photography, where the 36-exposure facility in the 24mm x 36mm format was a great advantage. By the mid-1930s, entire camera systems were marketed and available, certainly equalling anything available in today's terms if versatility and range were to be the guidelines. The introduction of colour transparency film by Kodak in America in 1936 in the form of Kodachrome, followed almost immediately by Agfacolour in Germany, added yet another dimension to the role of the miniature camera. In similar terms to the introduction of the Kodak Box Camera in 1888, Kodak were able to offer a simple processing system whereby the customer merely exposed the cassette of 36 exposures, mailed the film to Kodak who returned the processed colour transparencies mounted in card slides for viewing or projection. By removing the darkroom labour involved in black and white emulsion stock usage, the company opened up a new market in colour photography freed from the constraints of post-shooting developing and printing. Whilst in Germany, manufacture of 35mm cameras was primarily in the area of expensive precision equipment (for which there was no shortage of customers), in the United States, inexpensive 35mm cameras were manufactured to capitalise on the colour photography market now opened up by these new emulsions. Cameras such as the Argus undersold German imports by as much as 42 dollars - the German Retina retailed at 57 dollars in 1937 - and were immensely popular.¹⁹

This tremendous and sustained overall expansion of the photographic market in the 1920s and 1930s has provided much material for archival and historical reference. Complemented by an accompanying growth in home-movie making, there was now much greater

leisure time during which photography might be practised, and the increased mobility of many people offered even further opportunities for both snapshots and more serious amateur photography. Even political figures of the period were not immune to the amateur film makers and cameramen, and in the case of Adolf Hitler, the snapshots taken in the pre-war years within the closed circle of his 'court' offer an alternative form of evidence to the stylised and controlled images put out in the German press and newspapers of the day.

The 1930s was a decade of great economic, political, and social change, not only in Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, but throughout the world. Advances in modern transport and communications systems have already been referred to, but in the 1930s, these were accompanied by the emergence of the radio and the cinema as media capable of mass information, entertainment, and persuasion. Political movements, whether totalitarian or democratic, were quick to realise the potential of such media for propaganda usage, and the radical changes taking place across the world at a political level were paralleled by similarly radical advances in science and technology.

Photography was as much affected by these changes in the direction that society was taking as any other media, and it was from such advances that new attitudes towards the camera, (and its role and function in society) were being proposed. It is necessary to study these considerations in depth, as their effect upon the development of new visual ideas was considerable, and in certain cases, was made possible by them.

The 1920s saw the beginning of the end of the concept of the master photographer. The idea of a skilled, manipulative visual

craftsman had been deeply rooted in the tradition of photography - both in Europe and America. And yet, this apprentice-based, painstakingly thorough attitude towards photography contrasted with the technically-based, 'streamlined' society of the 1930s. The slow decline of this approach to photography in the 1920s was hastened in the 1930s by the emergence of a new type of professional photographer whose responsibility was to produce a photograph as a means to an end, and not as an end in itself. No longer was the production of a perfect, archival print the photographic ideal. What was needed was a quick, accessible, usable image that could be immediately translated into newsprint for mass readership and circulation. Some photographers were able to make this transition, but even the newer practitioners found the legacy of the past hard to shake off. Typical of these constraints was the attitude towards the new, smaller cameras then beginning to emerge. Christopher Brunel said this of early encounters with the new miniature cameras:

The tradition of your formal cameras was hard to shake off - you set them up (rather like you set up in a film studio), you had to get everything right, and you pressed the trigger - and that was that, you didn't even take a spare one or an alternative. That's one of the things that the miniature cameras were slowly breaking. It did give the photographer the chance of playing around with movement, or taking (great luxury!), three or four pictures of the same subject within a minute...²⁰

It was already apparent in the late 1920s that the demands of the emerging popular press would make inroads into established attitudes towards the application of the photograph in the press, and the miniature cameras demanded a fundamental re-appraisal of the medium in their acceptance and use. The earliest of these cameras (the German Leica) was pioneered by the engineer Oscar Barnack in the

late 1920s, and by the early 1930s, the original concept had been refined into a mass-production precision optical instrument. Although recognised by many photographers as a major advance in photographic technology, its acceptance in the world of the press-photographers and the news media of the day was less enthusiastic, primarily for production considerations. The problem was not with the camera, but with the film it used. This was sprocketed conventional 35mm film-stock, but run horizontally through the camera instead of vertically as in the film-cameras. A standard load could manage 36 exposures to a negative size of 36mm x 24mm, with special magazines for up to 250 exposures - although these were rarely used. This offered the photographer great range and versatility in the picture-taking process, yet in conventional press terms of the period, was very difficult to manipulate in the processing and printing stages once the film was out of the camera. To appreciate these problems, it is necessary to look at conventional press and news photography practice at the time.

The average newspaper or press agency darkroom was equipped to deal with the standard large-format plate negatives used in press cameras of the day, usually in sizes of 9 cms x 12 cms, 3 1/4 ins x 4 1/4 ins, or 5 ins x 4 ins. The standard press film was likely to be orthochromatic, which was insensitive to red light, and so could be processed under examination by red light in the darkroom. The standard approach to press and news photography of the period was simple. The photographer carried a fairly bulky, but not unduly heavy camera such as the Speed Graphic (particularly in America) or the VN or Minimum Palmos, together with up to a dozen loaded single dark-slides. Typical of the 1930s news-photographers approach was that of John Topham, a freelance of the period:

I preferred the VN press camera, but you just got into the habit when you went out on a job of carrying half-a-dozen plateholders in your pocket - invariably, the first picture you took was always the best.²¹

The job of the photographer was simply to get a picture as quickly as possible, write the barest details of the event or personality in soft-lead pencil on the back of the plateholder, and get the film to the processors as quickly as possible, often by motorcycle messenger. It was a matter of some honour to 'get the picture' first, and so with the bulky yet simple cameras of the period, a clear, sharp image was all that was required. Once the films or plates arrived at the processors, they were roughly processed by hand, and placed wet into an enlarger and a proof-print quickly made for the editor or agency news desk to see. The large size of the camera-original negative allowed for much abuse, and so the rough-and-ready approach to the processing rarely damaged or made the negative unusable.

Darkroom practices and print-production methods of this type were quite unsuitable for the semi-scientific approach required of the new miniature films and their cameras. Great cleanliness and care in unloading the miniature cassettes was essential, and the solutions for developing and fixing the negatives had to be mixed, stored, and used with precision and accuracy. Furthermore, many of the miniature film emulsions were panchromatic, that is, sensitive to all wavebands in the visible spectrum, and so all processing of the negatives had to take place in total darkness. Also, any errors in camera technique were magnified upon the small negatives being enlarged to any degree, and so a casual shooting technique was impossible. All these constraints of a technical nature militated against the early acceptance of the miniature camera approach within the news and press world generally, but this was not the only consideration against the new format.

The final consideration that weighed against the adoption of the miniature camera concept was that surrounding the choice and variety offered by the 36-exposure film cassette. The 'getting the picture' press attitude of the 1920s and early 1930s was endorsed, if not initiated, at editorial level. The facility of the miniature camera as a narrative tool, or as the means by which the photo-essay might be produced was not appreciated by the newspaper editors and picture-editors of the time. They were as much a product of their tradition, as were the photographers, and they had difficulty in coming to terms with the new dimensions of sequence and quantity offered by the 35mm system in terms of picture-selection and editing.

For such reasons, the miniature camera - and to a lesser extent, the compact rollfilm camera - rarely found favour with the newspapers of the early 1930s, and this persisted up to, and including, the outbreak of the Second World War. It is important to discern the reasons for this continued reluctance to grasp the potential offered by these new technical advances, as it remains the subject of much misunderstanding.

It is often proposed that post-Second World War photography became emancipated from earlier constraints because previously cameras were heavy and bulky, films were less sensitive, lenses were less advanced optically, and so actuality photography was not therefore possible, or at least, far more difficult. In fact, cameras, film emulsions and lenses existed as early as 1935 which, to all intents and purposes rival those available today, and from a technical viewpoint, there is no reason why narrative and photo-journalistic images could not have appeared in the general and newspaper press of the day. The reasons why they did not do so are paradoxical, and

relate to the application of photography, and not to photography itself.

The press and editorial establishments - both in Britain and America - were reluctant to embrace the new technical advances in photography because they were slow to realise its potential. The photographers, in their turn, were constrained by their aesthetic, professional and craft traditions so they had difficulty in moulding the new techniques into a creative tool without external stimulus to do so. Referring again to Christopher Brunel, who was experimenting with the Leica 35mm miniature camera in the middle 1930s in his freelance photography:

Even with the so-called freedom of the freelance photographer, one had to work within certain confines of the stereotype and the cliché. One had to obey certain laws of photography - the ideas of composition were drummed into me. People used rather heavy filters a lot - largely a question of style in those days - of getting nice, contrasty clouds in the picture.²²

It was because there was such a fertile level of development within the mass printed media and in photography in particular during the 1920s and early 1930s that the documentary movement was able to emerge and flourish in the latter part of the 1930s. Without such an involvement in the public domain through the press of the post-First World War years, it is questionable if the documentary movement could have received the endorsement from government and civil authorities that it inherited in terms of official validity and credibility.

NOTES

1. Ken Baynes, Scoop Scandal and Strife (1971) p.47
2. See Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, The Magic Image (1975) on Lewis W. Hine, pp.104/105
3. Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty (1978) p.81
4. Jorge Lewinski, The Camera at War (1978) p.63
5. Beaton and Buckland, op.cit p.126
6. Ibid
7. Cate Haste, Keep the Home Fires Burning (1977) p.1
8. Ibid p.45
9. Ibid
10. Lewinski, op.cit p.64
11. Michael Sanders, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War', The Historical Journal, xviii (1975) p.135
12. Ibid
13. Lewinski, op.cit p.70
14. Beaumont Newhall, Airborne Camera (1966) p.55
15. Ian Jeffrey, Thirties-British Art and Design before the War (1979) p.112
16. James Jarche, People I have Shot (1934) p.186
17. See Derek Smith, James Jarche - Press Picture Pioneer (1980) p.22
18. See Baynes, op.cit p.65
19. See Lahue and Bailey, The American 35mm (1977) pp.18/19
20. Christopher Brunel to author, 26th October 1980
21. John Topham to author, 17th December 1980
22. Brunel, op.cit

Chapter Three - The Documentary Idea

The middle years of the 1930s in the United States of America saw the emergence of the Farm Security Administration archive of photographs, a collection which has now become recognised and acknowledged as a watershed in the development of photography as a medium of social record and comment. The single factor that marked this piece of visual documentation as being founded within new concepts of photographic application rested within the method by which it was commissioned and endorsed. This is discussed in the introduction to a book on the work of Margaret Bourke-White by Theodore Brown in these words:

Beginning in 1935, the Farm Security Administration assigned a group of otherwise unemployed photographers to travel and make pictures around the country. Under the brilliant direction of Roy E Stryker, the FSA photographers created an archive of over 200,000 photographs which were eventually deposited in the Library of Congress. Among the fine artists working on the seven-year survey were Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and John Vachon. At about the same time, other photographers found employment under the Works Progress Administration Federal Arts Project. Berenice Abbott and the painter Ben Shahn were two who turned their cameras on the Depression to document its depredations.¹

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) was established by President Roosevelt, and so in effect, the American government was formally proposing and endorsing the creation of this record. It is this single dimension of 'official' and government involvement that marks the turning point between the photographic social record and the creation of the social documentary movement in still photography. As Gail Buckland writes in The Magic Image in the section devoted to the photographer, Dorothea Lange:

The project was the beginning of large-scale documentary photography in which there were no obligations to editor or sensation-loving public.²

This emancipation of photography from constraints of editorial interference and datelines allowed the growth of a personal level of involvement and social concern not previously evidenced in the work of earlier record photographers. In the work of the government-sponsored FSA photographers and their contemporaries, the concept of the 'concerned' photographer was established, many extending their photography into the published book format with text to underline and illuminate their compassionate images. Examples of this form of documentary presentation can be found in the work of Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell in the book You have Seen their Faces, published in November 1937. Margaret Bourke-White did not have need of the subsidy offered by the government agencies such as the FSA, but was instinctively drawn to document the upheavals in the social and economic life of America in the period. Bourke-White and Caldwell began travelling in June 1936, and their tour took them through eight states, from South Carolina to Louisiana, the results of this trip being published eighteen months later. The impact of this new style of documentary presentation was immediate, the critics being fulsome in their praise of this combination of text and pictures. Typical is the review by Ralph Thompson in The New York Times - "...Margaret Bourke-White's full page photographs...is as arresting a statement of the plight of the Southern Tenant farmers as we have ever had..the pictures produce such an effect...that the text serves principally to illustrate them."³ A further example of this style of writer/photographer collaboration can be found in the Walker Evans and James Agee production, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, which was somewhat overshadowed by the Bourke-White and Caldwell book, yet which had direct links with the FSA programme, of which Evans was a participant.

This book was based around the life of the share-croppers and their settings, and although not finally published until after the start of the Second World War - five years after the work was begun in 1936 - it remains (in Gail Buckland's words) "a documentary milestone."⁴

If such levels of personal commitment (allied to official government endorsement and patronage) were in themselves not capable of creating a new and exciting impetus to photography as a medium of social record, there was a further and more immediate development in the press and publishing world which guaranteed a mass exposure of this new level of endeavour. On November 23rd, 1936, the first issue of a new illustrated magazine was published, and the founder of this publication, Henry R. Luce, made this statement in the prospectus for Life magazine:

...to see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events;...to see strange things;...to see things thousands of miles away;...to see and take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed...to see, and to show, is the mission now undertaken by a new kind of publication.⁶

The publication of Life magazine - and the later Look publication of January 5th, 1937 - saw a uniting of the various components that comprised the documentary movement in America to that date. The combination of a new ethic in photography as a medium of social comment and record (now officially patronised by government), linked to technical advances in photographic and reprographic processes, ensured the creation of a new media force with its basis in journalism and photography. Theodore Brown writes of this fusion:

The mid-thirties were ripe for a photographic-journalistic medium; people seemed hungry for the concrete, realistic look at the world that photography provides. The Luce establishment had both stimulated and fed this hunger with the visually rich FORTUNE, begun in 1930, and the MARCH OF TIME newsreels, started in 1935. By 1938, a contemporary observer commented that 'the average citizen acquired most of his news through the medium of pictures.'⁶

In the pioneer work of these American photographers, can be seen the firm and unmistakable establishment of a tradition in documentary photography which distanced their work from that of their predecessors. As Gail Buckland writes:

The 'Compassionate Photographers' brought back historical documents. In comparison to anything that was being produced in England at that time they were milestones in the advance of photo-journalism"⁷

It was in the cinema that the British documentary impetus first manifested itself, and by the end of the decade, this movement had influenced photography, and its application in the press of the day. Such documentary impulses in the visual media were paralleled by further influences of a literary and social nature, which gave the British documentary movement its unique national character. When Paul Rotha wrote that "documentary film is the use of the film medium to interpret in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality", he was articulating the conviction of feeling that permeated much of the British press, literary circles, and art of the period.⁸ The similarities also expressed themselves in the particularly insular dimension that manifested itself in much of the film and photography emanating from the British documentary movement, and led Stuart Hall to talk of "this domestication of the documentary impulse -which in the English setting proved to be both its characteristic strength and its weakness..."⁹

The British documentary movement in the years from 1930 onward was at best a volatile and unstable creation. In reviewing its relevance, even in hindsight, it is difficult to arrive at considered judgements without being aware of the fragility of the movement. Unlike the American photographic tradition which was being established simultaneously across the Atlantic, the British movement lacked the

resources of formal government endorsement, being dependent upon quasi-official sponsorship - with all the attendant insecurities of finance and support - and was bedevilled by its sheer introversion and limited international appeal. The American photographers were documenting human suffering and deprivation as it was, and as it should be seen, and inherent in this approach was a sense of international awareness that such problems were not limited to their continent. When setting the British documentary movement against such broad sweeps of the camera as were being practised by the Americans, it becomes a victim of its own insularity. Perhaps the greatest promise that the brief emergence of the documentary movement offered, lay in the future rather than in the immediate fulfilment of the present. Within such a movement, traditions could be established for later reference, and guidelines established which identified national characteristics and attitudes. Grierson never lost sight of the long-term aim of the documentary film - placed unequivocally in the public domain - in these words:

The documentary film must pursue, in the deepest sense, the way of education, and long-distance education at that, or it loses its special claim to consideration.¹⁰

The emergence of a British documentary movement in photography in the 1930s equal to that in America, or even related to the filmic discipline in Britain, is hard to establish. In varying degrees, both the previously-discussed movements shared common credentials in terms of government and official sponsorship, social awareness and concern, and a recognition that the media of film and photography could, and should contribute to an awakening of public consciousness to problems of society of the period. In searching for such qualities within

photography itself in Britain, the rewards are scant. As discussed earlier, the evolution of the profession of photography in Britain, and its application in the press provided many interlinked and interrelated areas of practice, the sheer variety of which confused the emergence of a documentary movement with the intellectual base offered by that in America.

The early 1930s saw photography in Britain divided into three fairly identifiable genres. Firstly, the purely amateur market for recreational photography, now expanded as a result of modern marketing techniques allied to mass production methods. Secondly, the broad mass of professional photographers, mainly employed by the press, but now moving into areas of industrial and commercial practice. Finally, the photographers who operated in areas of mainly aesthetic practice, typified by Cecil Beaton and Bill Brandt. The intellectual stimulus was provided in the main by the latter group of photographers, primarily as a result of their education, but also because they were most likely to meet with other artists, writers, and journalists who shared their interests and opinions. The professional photographers were in the main apprenticed into the profession, and as such, tended to regard the making of a photograph as a job, for which they received financial reward. Within the amateur group or market, were emerging what in post-war years became known as the semi-professional, or serious amateur. This new approach to photography was part of the legacy of the small miniature 35mm cameras which offered tremendous potential for natural history, travel, and sports and action photography.

From all these various styles and groups of photographers was to emerge a gradual awareness that photography could be utilised as an

instrument of social comment and narration, even of social change. To pinpoint any specific contribution - as a result of which the British documentary photographer 'came of age' - is difficult, but there are signposts to be observed, and which cumulatively propose a change in perceptions of, and response to, the practice of photography. In a chronological sense, by the early 1930s, the technical equipment and processes existed which could affect a radical change in attitudes to photography, particularly in terms of low-light situations, candid photography, and the making of action photographs. Allied to this was an awareness by certain photographers that such technologies held great potential, but that as yet, the institutions of the press and publishing were not ready to use them. The final ingredient rested in a growing public awareness of the world and society in which they lived, and the fact that the newspaper and press and publishing industries would have to meet this demand for information. In discussions with other photographers of this period, such as John Topham and Thurston Hopkins, the overall impression one gains is that they were aware of the pressures and limitations upon them during this period, but that there was little they could do about it. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy perhaps to be critical of the lack of social conscience, but to quote a typical assignment of the type experienced by Thurston Hopkins:

I remember there was a magnolia tree in the City, and this always had to be photographed every year in blossom, and if you could get a young girl typist to eat her sandwiches under it in her lunch-hour, that was your picture - it would be bound to be in the evening paper the day after....¹¹

Assignments of such an undemanding nature were bound to erode any sense of social purpose on the photographer's behalf, and in writing

the introduction to a monograph on his photography, Thurston Hopkins has this to say concerning his early days in press-work in the mid-1930's.

Bitter as the experience had been in many ways it taught me a good deal about life, as well as photography. I learned how to cope with sudden difficulties, to swiftly improvise, and to work, unconcernedly, in all weather conditions and unhospitable circumstances.¹²

In the writings of Thurston Hopkins, Bert Hardy, and their contemporaries, one can sense frustration and irritation at the curbs and constraints placed upon them by the editorial attitudes of the period. Still, being in the main dependent upon newspapers and press-agencies for their income and survival, they were aware of new developments in picture magazines on the Continent, and the potential that such periodicals offered in terms of photographic endeavour.

Derrick Knight writes of this period:

By the 1930s, the newspapers started to expand their own photographic departments, but still, only in a very small way. The end of the 1920's and the early thirties can be described as the heyday of the agencies, when there were seventeen full members of PAPPA (the Proprietors Association of Press Photographic Agencies).¹³

It was for agencies such as Central Press Photos, Alfieri's, News Illustrated, and others that photographers such as Thurston Hopkins worked, the newspapers themselves only slowly awakening to the need to issue and control their photographs, rather than be dependent upon what was supplied to them.

Perhaps the first and most identifiable product of changing attitudes and values towards photography emanated from the more discerning area of photography represented by photographers of the

calibre of Bill Brandt and Cecil Beaton. In the early 1930s, both these highly individual and visually-aware photographers had already established a reputation within the field of the visual arts - Brandt returning to England having studied with Man Ray in Paris, whilst Beaton was active both in photography and stage and set design. They were considerably distanced from their press and news colleagues both in terms of their social background and education, and by not having to accept the day-to-day chores that assailed the less socially-advantaged professional photographers. Such advantages obviously rankled the less-fortunate, and John Topham, who in the early 1930's (like Thurston Hopkins) was learning his trade, said of Beaton:

Cecil Beaton started in society with a box-brownie as a boy...he was 'in' socially for a start...¹⁴

In such comments, one can still sense that there was a clear social distinction between the 'tradesmen' approach of the professional and commercial cameramen with their darkroom apprenticeship mode of entry into professional practice, and the 'gentlemen artists' represented by Beaton and Brandt. Each respects the other's photography, but perhaps not their mode of operation.

In 1936, was published what can now be identified as perhaps the sole example of British documentary photography allied to social comment to appear as a published book - Bill Brandt's The English At Home. In this work, Brandt took his camera into the enclaves of social privilege to present a quietly passionate view of the social divides which existed in British society of the period. In discussion with this photographer, it becomes apparent that it would be dangerous to assume that a strong sense of social conscience was the prime motivation for his photographs. In all his work, Brandt is

primarily visually motivated and of this period in his development, he states that "I wasn't aware of doing anything particularly different at the time", although of course such comments made in hindsight should be treated with caution.¹⁵ This visual motivation is touched upon in the section devoted to his work in The Magic Image:

Bill Brandt made early documentaries of middle-class life which he collected in a remarkable book, 'The English at Home'. He showed the stiff-upper-lipped parlour-maids, with their starched caps and aprons, standing by the laden dining-table, running the hot bath, or pulling down the blinds on to this ugly, cosy, virginia-creepered world. In the 1930s Brandt concentrated on showing the black depression of England in her economic crisis. He was subsequently influenced by the Surrealists; his Surrealism is perhaps nearest to Chirico and Magritte.¹⁶

Brandt's self-effacing approach to his work borders on detachment when discussing his photography from this period, and yet the importance of this book lies perhaps in its very singularity as much as in anything else. Like later developments in the picture-magazines, The English at Home remains an identifiable object in establishing an evolving social awareness in photography and the visual arts, and in a purely chronological sense, is the first dateable statement of such an evolution.

The work that Brandt's contemporary, Cecil Beaton was carrying out at this stage in his career was more diffuse and even ambiguous. In the introduction to The Best of Beaton, Truman Capote identified the elusive quality that has always been associated with this photographer:

It is not difficult to discern Beaton's influence in the work of others; a harder task is to identify those who have influenced him.¹⁷

Whilst in the early 1930s, Brandt was influenced by modern art traditions, Beaton was professionally engaged in commercial photo-

graphy (he worked for Conde Nast and Harpers' Bazaar intermittently), had public exhibitions of photography (Cooling Gallery, London, 1930), and of stage and set design (Redfern Gallery, London, 1936). Such a diverse creative activity perhaps prohibited the emergence of a style as clear as that being displayed by Bill Brandt at this period, and yet in the later years of the decade, and in the war years of the 1940's, both these English photographers produced work of great power and beauty which in no way compromised its social relevance.

The inter-war years from 1918 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 rarely involved British photographers - official or otherwise - in actual theatres of war. The two main identifiable conflicts of the period were the Abyssinian War of 1935, in which Italy invaded that nation on October 3rd, and the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. There was also the continuing level of internal struggles in China, which Albert Leventhal describes as "...thirty-eight years of local insurrections and civil war, of regional blood-baths and piratical incursions".¹⁸ In the latter conflict, Japan was involved intermittently as well, in her attempt to expand her own areas of influence and interest.

Such conflicts deserve consideration, for although British interests and formal military commitment was not involved, there were political overtones that affected British interests, and for the first time, moral dilemmas were being viewed through the lens of the camera. The short Abyssinian war of 1935 was perhaps the first 'modern' feat of arms in terms of its press coverage and newsworthiness. The Fascist state of Italy saw in Abyssinia a chance to show the world what a modern, industrially-based totalitarian state could do in terms of armed interference in the affairs of another nation, and also

viewed the campaign as a chance to show off the competence of the new, Fascist Italian Army and Air Force. Regardless of the eventual outcome of this campaign, it became a war in which the world's press was committed on both sides, and so in theory, might be the first 'accurately-observed' war. The reality was somewhat different - both the Italians and the Abyssinian regime keeping the correspondents away from much of the action, and as there were long periods of stalemate followed by equally long periods of consolidation, the inevitable temptation to create their own war became irresistible. To quote Phillip Knightley:

Since an invented story, unhampered by facts, makes more exciting reading than a heavily-censored account of a minor engagement, newspapers plumped for stories from Addis Abbaba, and this created a false impression of what was happening in Abyssinia.¹⁹

That such a temptation extended to photographers and film-crews is not in doubt. One British press photographer, P.H.F. Tovey of the Daily Express wrote of his frustrations in a later publication, and obviously endured "...hours of unrelieved idleness with always the promise of action postponed until 'tomorrow', but never kept, needless to say".²⁰ The Abyssinian War promised to be a great adventure for the world's press, but ended as a shabby affair, in which, regrettably, the photographers displayed "inexperience, lack of standards and professional dishonesty".²⁴

The Spanish Civil War, which began almost on cue as the Abyssinian campaign ended in the spring of 1936, became a very different affair indeed. By its conclusion in 1939, it had witnessed all the feared and predicted horrors of systematic aerial bombing of civilians, and had aroused international participation, particularly on behalf of the Fascist states of Italy and Germany. Such military

ventures were matched by the commitment of Soviet Russia on the Republican side, with international brigades from Britain, America, and elsewhere. It was as much an ideological conflict as a civil war - with the new totalitarian European states in direct confrontation with the forces of international socialism. Such conditions ensured a world-wide coverage of the event, but also witnessed a harnessing of the visual media to support particular and partisan viewpoints and attitudes.

The specific British involvement in photography of the war was sporadic and mainly press-initiated and based. For example, the Daily Express photographer already involved in the Abyssinian campaign, P.H.F. Tovey was almost immediately committed on behalf of his newspaper and quickly discovered that "Faking was the order of the day, even a tumble-down cottage was used as a background, and bodies placed in heaps to look like casualties of war".²² Lewinski writes "...censorship in Spain was very strict. Foreign correspondents and photographers, unless acting on behalf of and in co-operation with one of the sides, were hampered at every step".²³ Under such conditions, it is hardly surprising to find little genuine combat material with any validity, and even work of the great American photographer, Robert Capa, being suspect in its origin and authenticity.²⁴ In a war of ideology, in which the 'truth' becomes a commodity with a changing value, and in which all the methods of modern warfare and propaganda are being implemented, to expect the camera to have been anything but partial was an over-ambitious ideal. That many photographers behaved with great courage is not in doubt, but they were already being absorbed into a political arena in which the individual negative or frame-of-film was merely part of a far greater persuasive medium of

international dimensions, and all they could do, at best, was just take their photographs. However, unlike Abyssinia, the quality of these pictures was of a far greater emotional quality. In the bombing of civilians, it was possible to capture the fear and indignity of it all, and the new miniature cameras were finally being used in the proper manner as visual notebooks by which these events might be recorded and observed. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of British documentary photography and its application, the issue of Picture Post of December 3rd, 1938 carried the feature "This Is War", with this sub-heading - "The pictures on these and the following pages were taken during the great battle for the Ebro. They tell the whole story of a counter-attack by government troops. But they are not presented as propaganda for, or against, either side. They are simply a record of modern war from the inside".²⁵ This feature was illustrated by Robert Capa who, by that time, had been in Spain for two years, and was by now "...in truth a famous photographer, talented and nearly rich..."²⁶ Perhaps in Capa's work, and to a lesser extent in that of his colleague, David Seymour ('Chim'), can be seen the essence of what the Spanish Civil War represents in terms of war photography. Perhaps at last, the camera had become a compassionate instrument, directed at the effect of war as much as towards war itself. If Capa made direct statements in his photographs, then Seymour's evocative and powerful studies of a people at war are perhaps more their monument than Capa's 'decisive moment' approach.

The lesser, but more protracted struggle in China has never received the coverage allotted to the European events in Spain. Perhaps, as at the time, it did not appear to have the relevance it later assumed. Until the declaration of hostilities by Japan in

December 1941, all that the world knew of the struggle was the Sino-Japanese conflict over Manchuria, which dated back to 1931, and even earlier. However, in the aggression of 1936, which involved the bombing of civilians by the Japanese, similarities were evident in the widening of war to include the civilian population, and like the Kondor Legion of the Luftwaffe in Spain, the Japanese Imperial Army Air Force was using the Sino-Japanese conflict as a training-ground for later participation across the Pacific. Much of the photography taken in this theatre of war was carried out by agency men, mainly from United Press International, although freelance photographers such as Edgar Snow produced quality work for Life magazine. It is, however, often average in quality, and stereotypes - such as the image of victorious troops standing on an enemy aircraft brought down by anti-aircraft gunfire - almost exactly match similar images from Spain

The troubled period of the late 1930s not only saw major conflicts in China, Spain, and elsewhere, but in such conflicts, all the new ingredients of the mass-media were there to be used. By the newsmen, (both with camera and notebook), a new aggressive approach was being adopted. Matching such aggression was a new and formal attitude towards censorship, manifested not only by curtailing access to battle zones, and by stopping and editing pictures and copy to meet political and ideological expediencies, but by the staging and contrivance of faked events to simulate a proposed 'reality'. Such attitudes were now disseminated through formal propaganda agencies, illustrated picture magazines, cinema newsreels, and the press. It was in this period, and through such channels of communication, that the concept of the mass-media became a practical reality, and the documentary movement in photography being part of that reality became subsumed within it - a point discussed by Stuart Hall in these terms:

The characteristic tense of the news photo is the historic instantaneous. All history is converted into 'today', cashable and explicable in terms of the immediate. In the same moment, all history is mythified - it undergoes an instantaneous mythification. The image loses its motivation. It appears, 'naturally', to have selected itself.²⁷

It is this dimension that permeated not only the images of Robert Capa in Spain during the Civil War, but began to appear in the press and news photographs of the same period. In the instantaneous frozen frame of the airship Hindenburg exploding in flames at Lakehurst, New Jersey in 1937, in the photographs of the massive Nazi rallies in Nuremburg, Berlin, and elsewhere in the late 1930s, and in the press-photograph of Chamberlain at Heston airport after his meeting with Hitler in 1938 - here can be seen the deliberate and intended making of myth, as much in the application of the image as in the image itself. It was the realisation that the photograph had such a currency, uninhibited by language or culture, that brought the camera into the forefront of the 'weaponry' to be deployed by the mass-media forces in the forthcoming conflict of the Second World War.

The outstanding photographer emerging on the continent of Europe in the early 1930s was Henri Cartier-Bresson. Excited by the photography of Man Ray and Eugene Atget, he started photography whilst a student in England in 1928. By 1936, he had been travelling and taking photography seriously, working almost exclusively in the 'actualite' tradition. He had major exhibitions in Madrid in 1934, Mexico City in 1935, and in New York in 1935. He was one of the first photographers to embrace the new miniature camera in the shape of the German Leica with which he has worked almost exclusively. The classic phrase over the importance of capturing 'the decisive moment' comes from this Cartier Bresson view of the medium:

Photography is for me the development of a plastic medium, based on the pleasure of observing and the ability to capture a decisive moment in a constant struggle with time.²⁸

In Cartier-Bresson's work can be seen the conscious and deliberate attempt to use the single still photograph as a quintessential image. In such an approach to photography - in which a definitive and singular picture is obtained - the element of timing, and the ability to discern at what stage the shutter should be released formed the motivation behind the creation of the resulting image.

An alternative approach to that being demonstrated by Cartier-Bresson could be seen in the narrative and sequential style of photography then being practised in Germany. The concept of the 'photo-essay' was produced in response to the layout requirements of the new illustrated magazines, in which the editorial policy laid great emphasis on spreads of photographs rather than upon a single photograph. In this approach, pictures were required to relate to one another - to complement - so that the overall pattern created a narrative illustration which was 'read' rather than looked at, or glanced over. This narrative approach had connotations with journalism, and the use of sets of photographs required much care not only in graphic presentation, but in the writing and assembly of the relevant text and captions. Such editorial developments stimulated a new form of photography in which the photographer's role transcended that of the conventional press-photographer. Now, an appreciation and understanding of the media and context within which the photographs would be used became an essential discipline for the illustrative photographer.

Perhaps the photographer to whom the credit must be given for the creation of 'pictorial journalism' is Felix H. Man. In this photographer's work - and the evolution of the illustrated magazine in Germany - can be traced the application which would later fuel the documentary impulse in Britain. Man was born in 1893, and by the late 1920s was a well-established editorial photographer in Germany. More a journalist with a camera than a photographer per se, Man produced some eighty 'photo-essays' for the Munchner Illustrierte Presse, and a further forty for the Berliner Illustrierte magazine. However, when the National Socialist party came to power under Hitler in Germany in 1933, Man decided to leave, and came to Britain in 1934. The person who accompanied him, Stefan Lorant, provided the final link in the establishment of a British photo-documentary ethic based upon concepts of pictorial journalism, a developing social awareness, and the use of the picture-magazine as an instrument of social comment rather than mere illustration.

The picture-magazine, and its development, had technical reference points. The high quality of picture reproduction made possible by the use of the rotogravure process fuelled the use of pictures and photographs as methods of illustration, and by the late 1920s, such periodicals were numerous on the continent. In Britain, at the time Stefan Lorant and Felix Man arrived from Germany, the Illustrated London News was the main picture magazine utilising high-quality gravure reproduction. However, this was purely an illustrated magazine, displaying no political or social awareness, the features being exclusively of 'general interest'. When Stefan Lorant left Germany, he had been editor-in-chief of the Munchner Illustrierte, referred to by Rune Hassner as "perhaps the most interesting and vital

pictorial in Germany".²⁹ In this magazine, the emphasis was upon unposed news pictures, and 'photo-interviews' - the photographers involved (including Felix Man and Walter Bosshard), often using the new 35mm miniature cameras.

The picture magazine, Weekly Illustrated was established by the controlling company, Odhams Press, and launched on July 7th, 1934 with Stefan Lorant as editor. Immediately, he began to make use of his colleague Felix Man, and also featured Bill Brandt in early issues. He also commissioned established British press and news photographers such as James Jarche, Edward Malindine, Reuben Saidman and others who had previously worked on newspapers such as the Daily Herald and for the usual press agencies.

Lorant's stay at Odhams was brief, and by 1937, he had been asked by Edward Hulton - the founder of the Hulton Press - to plan and edit a new picture magazine for them. Drawing upon a nucleus of editorial talent that included Tom Hopkinson, who had also worked at Odhams, Lorant created a magazine that was to carry the British documentary idea in photography for the best part of twenty years. The first issue of Picture Post appeared on October 1st, 1938, and was an immediate success. After only four months, the print run was for 1,350,000 copies, an enormous quantity for the period. These early days are reviewed by Tom Hopkinson in the introduction to the anthology of the magazine, and it is obvious that Lorant's way of working caused problems:

He could only work when he had generated a head of excitement and enthusiasm. There was also sharp division inside the firm as to what kind of magazine this was to be. For Lorant and myself the main interest was that it should be strongly political, 'anti-Fascist' in the language of the time; we also believed that the magazine's success depended on its taking such a line. But being 'anti-Fascist' meant 'left-wing' - and our proprietor, Edward Hulton, was a staunch Conservative.³⁰

Lorant's great energy, despite political conflicts at management level, quickly stabilised Picture Post into a vehicle for social comment and criticism. Now that Lorant and Hopkinson had virtually a free hand, they were able to combine the journalistic and photographic ideas they shared into a cohesive visual document which shared both commercial success and intellectual quality. This final bringing together of the British literary tradition and the European revolution in magazine production produced the unique documentary quality of this magazine of which Stuart Hall has written:

Something of the quality of 'Picture Post' is to be attributed directly to the fusion of these two distinct journalistic traditions: the tradition of social comment and rapportage which Hopkinson inherited through English journalism and political writing in the 30s, and the revolutionary developments in layout, typography, and photography which flowered on the continent, in both commercial and avant-garde circles, in the inter-war years, and of which Lorant himself, and his photographers were able exponents".³¹

To this, perhaps the contribution of the British photographic establishment should be added. Although perhaps not as radical in their approach as their European contemporaries, and denied the access to picture magazines enjoyed on the continent, the British press, news, and commercial photographers had by this time established a clear tradition in observational photography that was later to develop and emerge into an almost recognisable British approach within documentary photography. As Ian Jeffrey writes of these immediately pre-war years:

Rather than tableaux, photographers now offered real-life fragments, showing their protagonists in action, and in contact with a world beyond the frame. In 1938/9 photo-stories lengthened, and in 'Picture Post' the more exhaustive surveys took up to 8 and 9 pages each, with many candid pictures taken on an emphatic diagonal..."³²

In the pre-war issues of Picture Post, can be seen the most instantly recognisable awakening of a documentary reality in photography, journalism, and the press, and the continuing evolution of this magazine and its imitators is in itself part of the British documentary idea. The pioneering spirit of Picture Post matched the inception of the earlier Life magazine in America, and in these two periodicals can be seen a common social impulse represented in published words and pictures. In British terms, there emerged in Illustrated magazine a circulation rival to Picture Post, yet which never equalled the unequivocally critical stance of the Hulton publication, despite a pedigree which dated back to the Weekly Illustrated magazine of 1934. The progressive policies adopted by the staff of Picture Post under the early guidance of Stefan Lorant offered a continuity of approach that was perpetuated when the exigencies of war caused changes in its management and structure. No other magazine can claim to have offered so many new concepts in editorial style, layout, and the use of the photographic image coupled to an uncompromising use of words and images as a medium of criticism and comment. As Stuart Hall writes:

Picture Post captured for the still commercially-produced 'news' photograph a new social reality: the domain of everyday life. The decisive ability of 'Picture Post' lies in its ability to look hard and record".³³

If the British documentary tradition in photography did not emerge with the immediate clarity that appears to have been accredited to the American genre, then the emergence of magazines such as Picture Post perhaps gave documentary photographs a public viewing place, and by so doing, helped to promote them. The commercial success of Picture Post was a public endorsement of many of the progressive policies that

Lorant and his colleagues had been proposing since 1934, and the existence of a receptive audience helped create the market and context within which documentary photography could expand and diversify.

The role that photography performed in magazines such as Picture Post and Illustrated had an entertainment and persuasive function inherent within it; in fact, the photograph had become subsumed into the editorial fabric of the publication. Once the photographer relinquished his prints to the editorial staff, all control over their usage was lost, and in that sense, the line between editing, censorship, and misappropriation became very fine indeed. However, there was one area of photographic practice in which the fundamental aspects of documentary reality were being more thoroughly observed, and where the photographer remained in control of his medium, both in its realisation and application. This was the Mass Observation survey of 1937 and 1938.

The impetus and direction of Mass Observation had its origin in the intellectual attitudes of Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, who founded the movement in 1937. The background of these two men - Madge was a writer and poet, Harrisson an anthropologist - created an emphasis upon observation rather than comment, and this was echoed in their stated aims in a Mass Observation pamphlet issued in 1937:

On this data science will one day build new hypotheses and theories. In the meantime, we must patiently amass material, without unduly prejudging or pre-selecting from the total number of available facts. All this material, all the reports from our observers, carefully filed, will be a reference library accessible to every genuine research worker.³⁴

The 'data' referred to was to be gathered in three ways. Initially, by inviting ordinary people to report on their everyday lives in diary

form. Secondly, by recruiting teams of observers, whose role was to watch, listen, and document all aspects of ordinary behaviour. Finally, to present a subjective view offered by poets, writers, and artists to complement the objective, documentary bias of the observers. The entire concept behind the process was the gathering of information, that would "contribute to an increase in the general social consciousness"³⁵ through an approach which "aims to be a scientific study of human social behaviour, beginning at home".³⁶ With the benefit of hindsight, such ambitions seem nebulous and vague, Tom Picton has written of the Mass Observation approach:

Mass Observers were ghosts of those earnest Victorians collecting butterflies, classifying fossils, pressing botanical specimens into their notebooks, but without any theories to tie all the information together. They were part of a documentary movement which worshipped the 'fact'. 'Facts', they believed, would make you free.³⁷

Regardless of the relative value of the Mass Observation movement in terms of overall effect, it remains an almost unique event in British culture, and the material now deposited at the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex bears witness to such a claim. The role that photography, and the photographers, played in the creation of such material remained obscure until as late as 1977, when an exhibition entitled Worktown was produced, and initially shown at the University of Sussex as part of a programme under the direction of Hilary Lane by the Gardner Centre Gallery. In the catalogue accompanying this exhibition, David Mellor, who organised the exhibition, claimed that "the art, and particularly the photography associated with the movement is largely unknown".³⁸ As far as the photographs in the exhibition were concerned, this was true.

In 1937 and 1938, Humphrey Spender took the photographs shown in the exhibition in the North West of England, mainly in Bolton. Spender was recruited by Tom Harrisson, admitting that "I was very intrigued by him himself, he had that kind of magnetic personality".³⁹ Spender had already been working as a photographer on the Daily Mirror under the title of 'Lensman', touring Britain, and had also covered the Jarrow March, the resultant photographs being published in Left Review. He belonged to the generation of British artists and writers of upper-middle class background who, because of economic factors during the early 1930s depression, took up the newer mass-media professions of photo-journalism, tabloid journalism and film-making. Accordingly, in 1937, Spender began to take his photographs in and around Bolton - coded 'Worktown' by Mass Observation - working with the 35mm Leica miniature camera for its unobtrusiveness and ease of action. In this work, he was accompanied by the painters Graham Bell, Julian Trevelyan, and Sir William Coldstream, who also on occasion took photographs. Spender's attitude towards the taking of these Bolton photographs was discussed with Derek Smith whilst the Worktown Exhibition photographs were being printed:

Tom (Harrisson) thought of the photographic side as very important but I saw it as pure recording. I was prepared to accept that. I did a lot of drawing and painting as well in Bolton. When I was taking a photograph I found I could visualise what the final appearance would be in the print....I was always seduceable by the idea of a 'good' photograph.⁴⁰

Spender also applies great importance to the need to work unnoticed by the subject - "that was an absolute golden rule, if anyone knew they were being photographed then it was a failure, it had to be unobserved".⁴¹ Implicit in this statement is an acceptance of the

Mass Observation role of an 'information gatherer', using the camera as the recording instrument. Spender endorses this by also admitting that he tried to conceal the fact that he was even a photographer, and that at that time, to work unseen and unobserved was very much part of the documentary approach in the sense that the resulting photograph was a 'document of observation'. Such comments tend to endorse the critical stance adopted by Picton in his assessment of the Mass Observation ethic, yet that is not the entire dimension of the photography carried out by Spender and his colleagues in these immediate pre-war years. Despite the perhaps narrow and doctrinaire approach they adopted in a purist 'observational' attitude to their picture-making, the resultant photographs have an honesty and clarity about them which is very much part of this approach. Referring to the introduction by Raymond Mortimer in Bill Brandt's The English at Home published the year before (1936), one can see this detached, impartial attitude to photography has a wider currency than might be supposed:

Mr Brandt shows himself to be not only an artist but an anthropologist. He seems to have wandered about England with the detached curiosity of a man investigating the customs of some remote and unfamiliar tribe.⁴²

Far from intending this as a criticism, perhaps Mortimer was praising the manner in which Brandt watched and 'observed'. If that was the case, then our analysis in hindsight must pay greater attention to the assumptions of the period, and not place forty-year old images in our present social context. In discussion with Humphrey Spender, it was quite apparent that he was all too aware of the weaknesses in the approach he assumed in the 1937/8 Bolton photographs, but equally unrepentant of the decision to adopt that approach at the time. Perhaps one dimension that Spender now sees in his work relates to the

effect of the passing of time on any photograph - "photographs taken, which at a subsequent date reveal 'truths' not relevant or apparent at the time".⁴³ This important point is also made in the foreword to the Worktown Exhibition catalogue:

There are good reasons for welcoming this exhibition. Its documentary content is especially rich. The photographs disclose a time and a place. But more than that, they have great formal strength. Humphrey Spender shows his material as it aligns, intersects and contrasts. His pictures invite and reward the closest attention, and because of this they succeed in their documentary role - as few comparable photographs do. They are at one and the same time informative and subtly designed, and deserve a place with the best of our photography.⁴⁴

The lateness with which Spender's Mass Observation pictures have been recognised perhaps makes a long-term assessment of their placement in the documentary tradition hard to assess. It is obvious from the early Mass Observation writings that they were conceptually using the camera as a recording-tool, rather than as an instrument of social change. By allowing a photographer of Spender's perception and vision to be their 'recorder', they perhaps unintentionally abrogated that function, and what we are now left with is as fine a set of socially-concerned documentary images of this period as we are likely to get. The fact that they have lain dormant for the past forty years in no way denies their quality, nor should the fact that they were never intended for mass circulation devalue their inherent documentary style and content. Spender himself acknowledges the dangers in viewing any photograph as an information source, when he says:

The permanent 'making of myth' can be a very real danger if photography is used as visual history.... The photographer has it in his power to manipulate the truth....a very important part of documentary photograph is control and manipulation of this 'truth'⁴⁵

When viewing the photographs that Humphrey Spender made in those years before the outbreak of the Second World War, there is evidence not so much of the detached, dissecting approach upon which the initial Mass Observation ethic may have been based, but of a controlled and disciplined awareness of the role of the camera as an instrument of social record and observation. Much in the same way as Bill Brandt, Spender observed, and in his observations, made social comments and passed opinions about the society of the period. The photographs that resulted are as much part of our documentary tradition because of this 'detachment' and not in spite of it. The impetus that gave rise to Spender's Mass Observation photographs shares the same common ground with that of the literary and social concerns that motivated the production of Picture Post and stimulated the work of the GPO Film Unit in the production of their documentary films. The over-riding concern of all these movements was to communicate their sense of social awareness and purpose to a broader public, and the newly-emancipated visual media of photography, film, and the illustrated mass-media publications provided the method by which this might be achieved.

In both America and Britain, the documentary impulse had its origins in the study of the human condition, and by implication, this credits the movement with social, political, and historical relevance. Concepts of realism and authenticity are firmly rooted within all areas of documentary practice, and in the 1930s, these concepts were, examined and experimented with on both sides of the Atlantic to produce some form of documentary idea which had both form and substance. In the final analysis, it was inevitable that national and cultural dimensions would play a major role in the moulding of such

ideas, and by the end of the decade, this was becoming apparent. Although such considerations coloured the character of the American and British documentary movements, they still shared much in common. Both acknowledged the emerging role and function of the camera as a medium of social comment and persuasion, and concomitant with this was a developing awareness of the archival value of the photograph as a social document. Finally, the inter-relationship between the photograph and text was acknowledged, and through the mass-circulation of publications such as Life magazine in America in 1936, and Picture Post in Britain two years later, the documentary image became part of everyday life.

NOTES

1. S. Callahan and T.M. Brown, The Photographs of Margaret Bourke White (1973) p.14
2. Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, The Magic Image (1975) p.16
3. Callahan and Brown, op.cit p.15
4. Gail Buckland to author, 10th June 1980
5. See The Best of Life (1973) p.2
6. Callahan and Brown, op.cit p.17
7. Beaton and Buckland, op.cit p.169
8. Paul Rotha, Documentary Film (1937) p.5
9. Stuart Hall, 'The Social Eye of Picture Post' Working Papers in Cultural Studies No.2 University of Birmingham, (Spring 1972) p.97
10. Rotha, op.cit p.10
11. Godfrey Thurston-Hopkins to author, 29th October 1980
12. Ibid
13. Ken Baynes, Scoop Scandal and Strife (1971) p.30
14. John Topham to author, 17th December 1980
15. Bill Brandt to author, 13th May 1980
16. Beaton and Buckland, op.cit p.104
17. Ibid p.177
18. Albert Leventhal, War (1973) p.146
19. Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty (1978) p.179
20. Jorge Lewinski, The Camera at War (1978) p.82
21. Ibid p.83
22. Ibid p.84
23. Ibid p.86
24. See Knightley, op.cit pp.209/212 and Lewinski op.cit pp.88/92
25. See Rune Hassner, Bilder for miljonen (1977) p.79
26. See Knightley, op.cit, p.211
27. Stuart Hall, 'The Determinations of News Photographers', Working Papers in Cultural Studies No. 3, University of Birmingham (Autumn 1972) pp.84/85
28. See Beaton and Buckland, p.188
29. Hassner, op.cit p.70
30. Tom Hopkinson, Picture Post 1939-1950 (1970) p.9
31. Stuart Hall, 'The Social Eye of Picture Post' op.cit, p.72
32. Ian Jeffrey, Thirties - British art and design before the war (1979) p.115
33. Hall, op.cit p.83
34. See 'Mass Observation', Camerawork No.11 (September 1978) p.1
35. Ibid
36. Ibid
37. Ibid p.2
38. Humphrey Spender, Worktown - Photographs of Bolton and Blackpool Taken for Mass Observation 1937/38 (1977) p.2
39. Humphrey Spender to author, 11th July 1980
40. Camerawork No. 11 op.cit p.6
41. Ibid p.7
42. Spender, op.cit p.4
43. Humphrey Spender to author, 11th July 1980
44. Spender, op.cit p.2
45. Humphrey Spender to author, 11th July 1980

Chapter Four - British Wartime Photography 1939-1945

The outbreak of war between Britain and Germany on 3rd September, 1939 found British photography in a state of flux, and the context within which it was to operate - namely, as an instrument of information and persuasion under official government control - ill-prepared for such an eventuality. Lewinski writes of this:

Britain was singularly ill-prepared for the outbreak of war. This unpreparedness extended to the field of photography and film, both as a medium of military record and as an aid to reconnaissance. The British Army had hardly any photographers in its ranks.¹

At the outbreak of war, some recognition was given to the possible future role that photography might play in providing a 'record' of the imminent conflict. In correspondence between the fledgling Department of Photographs at the Ministry of Information (MoI), and the Imperial War Museum, such commitments can be found:

The Museum has been in touch with certain officers of your Department in connection with photographs which are being issued by the Ministry, and the probability of their eventually being deposited in the Imperial War Museum, as you will remember was the case with the official photographs from the war of 1914-1918. This possibility becomes a moral certainty, since we have now been authorised by the Treasury to acquire records of the present war for ultimate addition to the Museum's collections.²

The letter from which this extract was taken is dated 23rd October, 1939, and it reflects credit upon those who approved an early commitment to the production of a photographic archive. Unfortunately, the armed forces at this stage were already prevaricating over the appointment of 'official' photographers. Although the Army and the Royal Air Force (RAF) had agreed to the appointment of these photographers, the Admiralty was baulking at the prospect, as

reflected in this letter to the Admiralty by an official at the Imperial War Museum, L.R. Bradley:

I understand from Hugh Francis, Director of Photographs at the Ministry of Information, that the Admiralty, unlike the other two Services, do not intend to appoint official naval photographers...This is a very poor arrangement from our point of view, and in the preservation of a national record of the work of the Navy in the present war...³

This letter - dated 8th November, 1939 - goes on to criticise the appreciation of the Admiralty into the role of photography:

I don't think there is any appreciation of the difference between photographs for an historical record and those for immediate use for the press. There are, obviously, objections to the taking of photographs for press purposes that would not apply to the work of an official photographer, which need not be put before the public until after the war.⁴

Already, concerns over censorship were being voiced, and it was being proposed that images that would be open to censorship might still be taken 'for posterity' and kept suppressed until the war was concluded. In correspondence such as this, the lack of thought given to the role of photography is made manifest, and offers firm evidence that no real plans had been made to use the camera, even as a recording instrument, let alone as a medium for documentation and comment.

The Army was equally unprepared. No formal unit existed at the outbreak of war, and early events - or lack of them, due to the Phoney War period of late 1939 and early 1940 - were covered by a mixture of Fleet Street and newsreel cameramen seconded to the Army, including established news photographers such as Len Puttnam and Leslie Davies. From this impromptu arrangement, there emerged the film and photographic section of the Army Public Relations Service, from which evolved the first Army Film and Photographic Section (AFPS)

based in Cairo, Egypt in late 1941, finally to emerge as the official Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) in time to cover the battles in the Western Desert in 1942.

The Royal Air Force had different, and more complex problems. Unlike the Army and Navy, it carried the direct responsibility inherited at the end of the First World War for tactical and strategic aerial observation and reconnaissance. During the inter-war years, attention to this had lapsed, and it was thanks to the individual and pioneer work of a civilian aerial photographer, Sydney Cotton, that by the outbreak of war, some form of reconnaissance unit existed.

Perhaps the first British photograph of the Second World War was that taken with a camera installed in a Bristol Blenheim light bomber, that took off from Wyton one hour after war had been declared to photograph the German fleet at Wilhelmshaven. This first flight was an inauspicious start to what later became the finest aerial reconnaissance force in the war, and which in turn, became as much part of the propaganda machine as less objective enterprises. The Royal Air Force, because it depended on accurate aerial intelligence, was well-placed to use photography in other ways. The RAF was committed not only strategically, but tactically also, and as the war progressed, this level of intelligence support reached enormous proportions.

One of the first and most immediate restrictions placed upon the taking of photographs was the issue of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Control of Photography Order of September 10th, 1939. This piece of legislation had a greater effect upon the practice of photography than any other, as it specifically listed those subjects which it was now illegal to photograph without official permits, and

also made it clear that "No person shall publish in any manner any photograph; sketch, plan, or other representation made in pursuance of a permit granted under this Order, unless, and until it has been submitted to and approved for publication by the authority or person by whom the permit was granted; and approval may be given subject to such conditions or restrictions as may be thought necessary in the interests of the defence of the Realm."⁵ In this Order, not only was the taking of photographs of a large range of subjects prohibited - fortifications, barracks, factories, docks, railway-stations, etc - but even when a permit had been issued, the resulting photographs had, in effect, to be censored. This gave the authorities control over what was photographed, by whom it was photographed, and for what purpose it might be photographed, and whether or not the submitted print was in itself a permissible rendition of the subject photographed. Such levels of legislation amounted to total control and censorship over the taking of a photograph except for the most innocuous of reasons, or of the most mundane of subjects. For amateur photographers, a card was available through photographic dealers listing "unrestricted subjects" not subject to the Order, typical of which were "babies and children", "trees, landscapes, and cloud studies", "hiking, cycling, and picnic pictures", and even "all games played in the open". This card also carried the injunction to "carry this card with you to show should you be questioned when using your camera".⁶

The early months of the war not only saw the formal implication of government restrictions through the Control of Photography Order, but the less predictable change in social attitudes towards the carrying and use of a camera. The Photography As Usual

card already referred to was a manifestation of the worry felt by many citizens of the United Kingdom over the possible use by the Germans of a 'fifth column' of spies, saboteurs, and insurrectionists. In such circumstances, and to a certain extent fuelled by the Ministry of Information's early exhortative campaigns utilising slogans such as "Careless Talk Costs Lives", the carrying of a camera began to imply anti-social and unpatriotic motives. This concern is discussed by Zbynek Zeman as "...a mild form of mass paranoia - the feeling that the state was being besieged, and not only from outside but also from 'the enemy within'."⁷ For the person in the street, commercial manufacturers such as Ilford produced leaflets such as What Photographs Can I Take In War-Time?, and prefaced the text with the words "This is a problem which has been worrying amateur photographers since the War Office issued the Control of Photography Order in the first few weeks of the war..."⁸ The leaflet went on to reassure the public that the average snapshotter was in no way affected by this Order, although full and total endorsement of the regulations was of course printed.

Although the amateur photographer might have felt reassured by such advice, the professionals were less sanguine over the effect of this new level of restriction. Correspondence in the Mass Observation files dating from early 1940 expresses concern over over-zealous implementation of public duty - "...but don't forget that all people don't know the law about war-time photography and a case was reported in the press a few weeks ago of some ultra-patriotic busybody forcibly attempting to stop a photographer taking something he was quite entitled to take."⁹ Equally, press and newsmen encountered similar problems such as that described by John Topham in the early part of the war:

I was taking pictures of trench-digging on Blackheath - early in the war - somebody rang the local police, and they came to my office and demanded the pictures. Well, I'd got an MoI permit, so I thought 'hell, take them... I can easily take them again', I just didn't want to be bothered.¹⁰

Such restrictions were matched by over-zealous picture censorship - Topham mentions the example when "I did a series of gunners who did a can-can dance...the pictures were stopped because you could see the breech of a gun..."¹¹ At an early stage of the war, Admiralty censorship reached the level which caused Churchill to claim that "if the Admiralty could have their way, they would prefer a complete silence about naval affairs, but as the public had to be fed, they were prepared to co-operate".¹¹ Charles Gibbs-Smith, who was working in the Department of Photographs in the early stages of the war - he later rose to become Director of the Photographs Division by the end of the conflict - commented that "they (the Admiralty) simply didn't care ... the Admiralty had a scheme whereby any of their naval officers could take photographs - astonishing thing - and in the old days they could market them themselves. We took ages in forcing the Admiralty to get them to send them to us".¹³

Such levels of restriction and censorship, aided by obvious indecision and inexperience on the authorities' side in the early months of the war, both frustrated and hampered the documentary use of photography. Whether civilian or military, the photographer had to learn to work within the constraints being applied, the prime considerations being the gaining of a Ministry of Information 'red pass', and the maintenance of equipment and materials.

The MoI 'red-pass' had to be applied for by the photographer, or his representative, to the Ministry of Information in duplicate. He had to state that he was "by profession a whole-time Press

Photographer/Film Camera Man",¹⁴ and undertake - this being the crucial pivot of the censorship process - "...not to publish in any manner any photograph or film made under the permit unless and until such photograph or film has been submitted and approved for publication by or on behalf of the Director-General of the Ministry of Information."¹⁵ The application went even further - "...that possession of such a permit will not entitle me to enter or take photographs or films of or within any prohibited or protected place or protected area."¹⁶ By this document, all photographers, whether civilian, 'official', armed service units, or even foreign correspondents were committed to a submission of all their photographs to, and through the formal and controlled censorship facilities of the Ministry of Information. It is that particular and dedicated level of government supervision over British photography during the Second World War that supports Nicholas Pronay's statement that:

The 1940s were the one period of British history when there was a serious and sustained effort by the State to control public opinion.¹⁷

The early war period - from the opening of hostilities on 3rd September, 1939 to the invasion of France and the Low Countries by German forces in May, 1940 - revealed confusion and uncertainty as to the function and role of photography within the Ministry of Information. The machinery of control and censorship over the issuing of photographs was primarily negative, designed to stop the issue of information, not to create it. Initially, the photographic activity of Ministry was contained within the General Production Division, but by May, 1940, the pressures and demands for the creation of a separate section became overwhelming, and the Photographs Division came into existence on the 3rd of that month. The Director of the Photographs Division was Hugh Francis, fortunately a capable and energetic man who

had served in the Ministry in the First World War, and who had immediate business experience as a senior executive with E.M.I.

The immediate prime function of the Division was to effect government control of photography in all its forms, including the distribution and censorship of photographs, and later, to initiate the creation and issue of some of the official photographs. In the early war period, particularly when the Division came into being, the prime concern was to counter the numerous criticisms over the handling and issue of photographic material. As at this stage in the conflict, the service organisations had not yet formed themselves into operational units, so much of the field photography was still in the hands of accredited civilian personnel. This created friction between the photographers and the field military censors, who found it hard to come to terms with the idea of working with civilian cameramen, so little photography filtered through the over-zealous military censors. On the Home Front, where such military constraints were less evident, peacetime attitudes persisted, however, and although much of the photography was civilian originated, it was usually of a contrived and patronising nature showing 'life going on as usual', typified by feature articles in Picture Post such as "Aladdin:Pantomime of Mothers" and "The Day of a Pigeon Conscript".¹⁸ By this period, German propaganda and photography had already scored a telling 'victory' in the coverage of the Polish campaign immediately, and prior to Britain being committed to war with Germany. In this Blitzkrieg war, German Propaganda Kompanie (PK) cameramen swept forward with the German troops and air-force, providing photo-coverage as dynamic as the style of warfare itself, and so imprinted images of a resolute and powerful adversary upon the world's press and

readership. Although the military events were as yet hardly worth covering - certain photographs were already being taken on the home front which were to prove of great creative value in retrospect. As Lewinski writes:

In any case, there was little to write or photograph in the days of the 'Phoney War', as George Rodger's weary correspondent and the lonely French sentry on the Maginot Line by an anonymous photographer wittily demonstrate.¹⁹

It was in these early months of the war that Bill Brandt, walking through blacked-out London, noticed the effect of moonlight on the buildings for the first time. During November and December, 1939, Brandt took a sensitive series of urban landscapes by moonlight, later printed in Lilliput magazine. From discussion with this photographer, once again, it emerged that the motivation was purely personal and visual. There were no hidden motives or persuasions behind these pictures, merely a reaction to what he saw in front of the camera. He "took photographs for the sake of it", but accepted that such personal images became public property when revealed to a larger audience.²⁰ This approach remained the motivation for much of his work, including that taken during the Second World War.

The feeling when viewing photographs from this early war period is one of a lack of urgency and pressure. The magazines were full of what can only be described as 'filler articles' - with little conscious effort to create the concept of a nation at war, and even magazines such as Picture Post were producing bland and compromising issues. The inter-relationship between the official picture supply and this blandness cannot be avoided - the early activities of the MoI were incompetent, and as Lewinski claims - "...publications used German

sources in desperation, complaining bitterly and constantly about the inadequate, dull pictures issued by the Ministry of Information."²¹ This resulted in covers and feature articles such as that of Picture Post of December 16th, 1939 with the title "The Life of Goering - is he Hitler's successor?" As early as November, 1939, Picture Post had been in contact with the Ministry over problems in obtaining photographs and this was the start of a long and acrimonious dispute between this magazine and the MoI that was perpetuated throughout the war. Initially, the MoI produced a preliminary report and following this, Picture Post (and others) were asked to quote for a 'special supplement'. On November 21st of that year, Stefan Lorant and Edward Hulton met with the MoI to discuss this project, and the minutes of this meeting proposed:

It was agreed that the MoI should endeavour to obtain special facilities from service departments to enable Picture Post cameramen to photograph subjects under the control of those departments. These photographs should be exclusively for use in the special publication in question.²²

Contents for such special issues were even proposed - such as "The Power of Britain", "A Day in the Life of the Royal Family", and "The Power of Truth". In the titles of these speculative articles, much of the socially-based pre-war attitude of this publication appeared to have been subsumed into a morale-motivated blandness, but this is not how it was seen at the time. Friction is evident in the incomplete files of correspondence, with Hulton's manager Maxwell Raison reminding the MoI that "Picture Post is read by something like six million people..."²³ Obviously, the Hulton Press felt they were a special case by the nature of their circulation, equalled by the Ministry's determination that they were not - reflected in this note issued by Hugh Francis, Director of the Department of Photographs on January 15th, 1940:

There is one over-riding difficulty in the case of Picture Post which, although not mentioned in Mr Hopkinson's memorandum, is at the root of most of their troubles - the apparent inability of Picture Post to realise that there is a war in progress.²⁴

That such a level of hostility already existed officially was a harbinger of things to come between the press and the Ministry. Francis goes on to criticise their attitudes to many aspects of photography, mainly over the manner in which they were slow to react to government requirement over the need for the MoI 'red-permits' for all their photographers, and other bureaucratic problems. However, there is much common agreement, as shown in this further statement by Francis:

The excellence of German photographs in the early days was largely due to the fact that they had action in Poland which was lacking on the Western Front. The German type of photograph, is of course, fundamentally the same as that desired by Picture Post and I should myself like to have more of the type available, along with better subjects and better 'stage management' - the two latter are in my opinion the prime needs.²⁵

In reading these reports and memoranda, there appears to be sympathy for the plight of Picture Post, compromised by entrenched attitudes on both sides. In the MoI, and in Hugh Francis in particular, can be sensed the corporation ethic in conflict with a 'right to know' publication, which, in the political climate of the day, was perhaps one with abrasive, even left-wing pretensions. What is more important, however, and which had later implications for the practice and application of documentary photography is the clearly partisan approach being directed against Picture Post in favour of its circulation rival, Illustrated magazine. In the note already referred to, this comment occurs:

Nevertheless, as is shown by looking through Illustrated, first-class exclusive and 'intimate' photographs can be obtained. With the regard to the Admiralty generally, I had a long talk with the Art Editor of Illustrated on Saturday on other matters, but it is interesting to note that he volunteered the information that the Admiralty had proved the most helpful of all the Service Departments...No photographer could complain about the opportunities offered.²⁶

That this unrequested level of recommendation be given to Illustrated, particularly in respect of the Admiralty, (never the easiest of Services to work with) raises two issues. Firstly, that this initial preference for the less-editorially abrasive publication was endorsed in later episodes over the commissioning of special photography issues - and secondly, that Service co-operation related directly to the level to which photographers and their magazines were to be critical or interrogative. The event that occasioned the plaudits to the Admiralty was the taking of the most ordinary of photographs of a supply-ship reproduced in a recent issue of the magazine. The complaints emanating from the Hulton Press were directed exactly at this bland approach to the use of photography - in Tom Hopkinson's words at the time:

The idea of telling a story in pictures is still something new in Fleet Street. Few papers attempt to do it. Not half-a-dozen cameramen in the whole country understand the technique.²⁷

It appears that it was also something new in the Ministry of Information in 1939 and 1940.

The early months of the war did see some movement within the MoI over the role of photography, some of which was crucial for later activities. In a report dated December 18th, 1939, produced by W. Surrey Dane of the General Production Division of the MoI, the following phrase occurs:

There can be no doubt that really good sets of photographs of this kind provide widespread and effective propaganda material, acceptable all over the world..."²⁸

This referred to a proposal that a Feature Photographs Unit be established to carry out the role "...of supplementing regular photograph arrangements with absolutely exclusive and individual 'feature sets' (i.e. each a complete and self-contained series devoted to a topic selected by the Photograph Section in collaboration with the Publicity Divisions..."²⁹ In such official records, can be seen early commitments to photography as a propaganda medium, but their implementation remained a longer-term problem. The MoI did eventually create a Features Unit, but only after other, and more fundamental events had taken place.

As has been discussed earlier, by the time that the Germans invaded France and the Low Countries in May, 1940, problems already existed between the press and the MoI over the supply of photographs, and new heights of criticism and friction were to be reached in the ensuing months as that brief campaign unfolded. The 'Phoney War' period had seen friction between the military, the MoI, and the civilian press correspondents and photographers, primarily over the need to 'create' news and events due to the lack of any 'real' actuality material being available. As Phillip Knightley points out: "Major stories, such as the King's visit to France, resulted in chaotic arrangements for photographers and correspondents alike, with restrictions on their numbers and a ban - later lifted - on reporting the visit at all."³⁰ When the Germans broke through the ineffective French resistance, and fanned out across France and Belgium, events moved so quickly that the speed of the advance utterly compromised any

photo-coverage of it - at least from the British viewpoint - whilst the German PK companies, experienced in Poland and Norway, again produced vivid, compelling images of an irresistible army on the move. Although the British had managed some photography accompanying their raids on the Lofoten Islands in April 1940, their experience was minimal when compared with that of the Germans. However, there was an official Army photographic and film unit in France in May, 1940, albeit in embryo form, which, following their retreat across France, took film and photographs of the evacuation at Dunkirk. The paucity of their material is evidenced by the surprisingly few images that exist, a reflection of the inadequate preparation at all levels, and its effect on the production of a photo-coverage of such a crucial event. Many of the photographs we now associate with Dunkirk were taken by unknown amateur photographers who submitted their snapshots for possible publication after the troops were back home. As a result of their photographs, (rather than those of the official and civilian press photographers) at least some visual record was made of the evacuation, and its implication for the future conduct of the war.

Up to this date, the concept of a civilian population under sustained aerial attack as proposed in the idea that "the bomber would always get through" had yet to materialise. The retreat to Dunkirk, and the realisation that Germany would now utilise her air-force to attack the British Isles changed that possibility into a reality, and from July 1940 until October of the same year, the aerial conflict known as the Battle of Britain was evidence of that intent. To discern between when the Battle of Britain ended, and when the Blitz began is not the point at issue in this study. The shift in the use of photography was fundamental and clear; no longer would the camera

be directed at the armed forces and their endeavours; it would be turned on the citizens of the country, who were now as committed to the rigours of war as any soldier, sailor, or airman. Concomitant with this was the slow realisation by the authorities that the photograph might be usable as a method by which morale might be conditioned and sustained, but that equally, the 'wrong' type of image might corrode and even destroy such confidence in the civilian population.

This realisation of the power of the photograph can be ascertained from the MoI files of this period, and in the correspondence between the Ministry and others. Typical of this is a letter from Sir Kenneth Clark at the MoI to Maxwell Raison at the Hulton Press referring to an air-raid issue of Picture Post of 17th August 1940:

It may be objected that some of the pictures are rather alarming, but in a number which sets out to give the facts, there is no good pretending that bombs do not do a great deal of damage. Some of the photographs in the public shelter are extraordinarily beautiful.³¹

Shelter photographs now became the staple diet for many photographers, and for the public also. Robert Capa, visiting London took some memorable pictures, amongst which the photograph of an air-raid warden drinking tea with an old lady is perhaps the best-known. Cecil Beaton, Bert Hardy, and many other photographers covered the Battle of Britain and the Blitz with equal skill, their work appearing all over the world - in Beaton's case on the cover of Life magazine. Perhaps the greatest set of images from this period can once again be attributed to Bill Brandt in his Shelter series, taken in November 1940 at the behest of Hugh Francis at the MoI. By now, as we have

seen, there was a Photographs Division as such at the Ministry, and this allowed some autonomy in the commissioning of work. Brandt's reputation was such that he was asked to produce a portfolio of photographs, which he freely admits were for propaganda purposes, and these photographs would then be used in whatever way the MoI thought fit. In this set of pictures, Brandt resorts to all the subtlety at his disposal. Working with a Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex camera, he produced images which are in every sense great visual documents, endorsed and authenticated in context and application by the known circumstances surrounding their production, and by the photographer's own attitudes and opinions. When asked if he felt he was making documentary images at the time he took the photographs, Brandt's response was typically elusive but honest - "Not really - I would have taken them anyhow."³² He went on to take many more photographs throughout the war for both the MoI and the press, but the Shelter images remain his own personal favourites from the period, and in retrospect, remain truly remarkable documentary images in any sense of the word.

The year 1942 saw the United States of America enter the war against the Axis Powers as an ally of Britain, and gave real hope that victory might be a probability rather than a possibility. The attack on Soviet Russia by Germany in 1941 had removed the greater weight of the bombing offensive from British cities, and 1942 also saw the opening of the Allied air-offensive against Germany and Italy. It was also a year of defeats for the British in the Far East - in Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaya and elsewhere - and yet was the year that brought Britain a significant victory in the Middle East at El Alamein, after suffering setbacks in the Dieppe Raid of August of that year, and the

ignominious 'Channel Dash' when a German battle-squadron passed through the Channel on its way to the Baltic. Above all, for photography, it was the time when the combat photographers at last had something to celebrate and report rather than suppress or deny.

Throughout 1942, the Middle East remained the focus of much attention from a propaganda viewpoint, reaching a climax in the autumn of that year with the British offensive at El Alamein. In this particular event and locale, the Army and RAF Photographic Service Units produced much of their finest work, but also raised questions over the authenticity of much of their material. A further dimension in the use of the camera in war that also emerged at this time relates to the creation of military personalities, in which the photograph played a part.

By May, 1942, the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) was based in Cairo, Egypt, with a muster of some thirty-two film and stills cameramen. Many of these cameramen were ex-Fleet Street news photographers, or movie newsreel operators, quite used to a fairly robust attitude to the getting of pictures. In the Western Desert, conditions were at last ideal for the making of vital, exciting pictures in an arena where perhaps at last, a British victory might be gained. The normal practice for operational work was for a stills photographer to accompany the movie cameramen - the former probably equipped with the officially-issued Zeiss Super-Ikonta folding camera together with acquired or privately-owned Leicas or Contaxes - whilst the movie cameramen would be using their American Bell and Howell Eyemos or De Vrys. With the opening barrage at El Alamein on the 23rd October, 1942, the AFPU units filmed and photographed the event, but incurred casualties with four killed, and seven wounded, and

others being taken prisoner. The resulting footage and photography was both graphic and inspiring, resulting in the film 'Desert Victory' and an MoI publication of the same name featuring a compilation of the stills-photographs. The impact of these images was considerable - Alamein was the first clearly identifiable British victory - and such exhortative images served to celebrate this fact. As an ex-AFPU cameraman has written:

Audience reactions to Desert Victory were, generally, very good, especially amongst women who, apart from the many actually seeing their men-folk, were made more aware of the realities of warfare.³³

However, for the documentary student of the photographic image, there was a qualification to this success:

But there were always the critics; those with enough technical knowledge to point out the fact that the night sequences could only have been filmed in a studio. Perfectly true - they were...What some people may not realise is that many later film sequences and stills pictures were studiously faked and passed off as the real thing.³⁴

In the Western Desert, distance played a major part not only in the conduct of the campaign, but in the recording of it also. With little or no cover, excellent visibility, the chances of getting close to the action were few and far between. Little wonder, therefore, that in desperation, scenes were created and staged to achieve the desired effect. Lewinski cites this example as typical:

One of the best-known pictures of the desert war, prominently displayed in the entrance to the Imperial War Museum, of a Desert Rat running into battle with a pistol in his hand is rated by most as a skilful reconstruction of a scene which nevertheless was a common occurrence in the war in North Africa.³⁵

We can gain access to more specific information when referring to correspondence. Jack le Vien, now a film producer, had this to say of his experiences in North Africa whilst assigned to assist Allied War Correspondents:

Many of the best 'action' pictures of the Second War were staged shots posed in the vicinity of the front lines. The choice was often that, or no photograph at all to illustrate to the people at home what their men at the front were experiencing.³⁶

Le Vien goes on to explain that the prevailing conditions often made the making of films and photographs impossible, and so:

Accordingly, during lulls, troops and equipment were used to pose 'realistic' war photographs. Although the photographers, I believe, considered this their duty in the interest of informing the public, rather than an attempt to deceive, I am afraid that mostly these photographs were not described in the captions as having been posed.³⁷

During the Western Desert campaigns of 1942/43, other photographers were in the theatre of operations. Presenting a very different view of the conflict was Cecil Beaton, now commissioned by the MoI to take photographs in that arena, typical of which were those reproduced in the Geographical Magazine of March 1943. The manner in which war photography found its way into such unrelated journals is a reflection of the control being exercised by the MoI over the press at all levels, ensuring a broad readership of such images. The feature is extensive - some eight pages - and is entitled 'A Desert Log'. The preface reads:

Mr Cecil Beaton was recently given an opportunity of exercising his skill as a photographer with the 8th Army in the Middle East. Some of the photographs he took are presented here, accompanied by notes from the journal he kept while making a tour of the Desert Battlefields.³⁸

In utter contrast to the action photographs of the AFPU photographers, Beaton's pictures were controlled, behind-the-lines material, exquisitely framed and composed, but lacking in any sense of urgency

or excitement. His approach was undemonstrative and observational, almost as though the war was an irrelevance to him. Only in the text did Beaton's commitment come through:

In this God-forsaken spot, talking in strong Lancashire - or other county - accents, sun-burnt to the colour of rich cedarwood, with bleached hair, wearing shorts, sun-glasses and topees, these men are, in spite of a superficial unlikeness, no different from their opposite numbers working in camp or aerodrome throughout England.³⁹

Beaton was a great patriot, and believed deeply in the war. He was also incapable of seeing anything without bestowing some kind of formal dignity upon it through the camera, and both these qualities are evident in such work.

It was during the Desert campaigns that the AFPU first became known to the public - often through the press itself. Typical of such promotions were articles that appeared in Illustrated magazine of 20th June, 1942 under the headings "Birth of a War Picture" and "Soldiers of the Propaganda Army". The photographs accompanying these articles were posed and obviously contrived, with text that was simplistic and direct:

And they provide a most effective counterblast to Nazi propaganda which - unlike our own - frequently includes pictures that have been skilfully faked for neutral consumption.⁴⁰

Equally unequivocal was a further feature in The Illustrated London News of 21st November, 1942 with the heading:

The intrepid photographers who have been given a free run over the field at the risk of their lives: the Army Film and Photographic Service in action.⁴¹

There were also public exhibitions of war photographs at this period. In August, 1942, advertisements appeared in the press promoting an

exhibition of War Pictures at Dorland Hall, Regent Street in London - described as "...the Royal Academy of Photography", one review claimed:

As far as expert opinion is concerned, the exhibition has made a real contribution to the art of photography. The pictures are interesting if only for their variety of subject. There are some which stand out for their clarity and light effect. Others are striking from a dramatic point of view. An 'Atrocity' section, for adults only, gives sufficient atmosphere without being horrific.⁴²

The mounting and sponsoring of such exhibitions by the Ministry of Information reflected a growing acceptance of the role that photography could play in the maintenance of public information and persuasion under official patronage. The advance publicity for such exhibitions was almost circus-like in its bravura - "The Battle of the Atlantic, Commando Raids, Paratroops, Bombs on Germany, 'The Auk' in action, etc, etc, etc"⁴³ - yet it was a genuine effort to use photography to keep people in touch with the war, and met with enthusiastic public response.

The middle years of the war saw the most rapid expansion of the service units employing photography, both in personnel recruitment and their deployment. The Admiralty were now training both men and women as photographers and assistants, having established a Royal Navy School of Photography at Tipner, with a satellite unit at Ford in Sussex. The main school later moved to Felpham, near Bognor Regis, where the main emphasis was on aerial survey, observation, and reconnaissance work. Active service duty was carried out by naval ratings and officers as observers and cameramen, with Wren personnel being trained in the support role as photographic printers and assistants. To the end of the war, official photographers remained a

rarity in the Navy. This is supported by the comments made by one of the few drafted onto a capital ship, Douglas Rendell, who wrote: "Most of the Navy probably never saw a Wren photographer, or a male one for that matter. In fact, one male ex-photographer I have spoken to did not even know there was such a species, for he had spent much of his time abroad."⁴⁴

The Royal Air Force photo-reconnaissance units, after initial problems were now established as a vital component in strategic and tactical reconnaissance, being based primarily at Benson in Oxfordshire - the operational home of the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) - with intelligence and photo-interpretation being carried out at Medmenham in the Thames Valley. In addition to this purely functional role, the RAF Photographic Units also served in the field, much in the same manner as their Army AFPU counterparts.

The Army remained the most consistent user of 'field photography', and recruitment had reached such a pitch that by 1942, the MoI Photographs Division issued a leaflet entitled Sergeant-Photographer : This Is Your New Job. This five-page document remains an almost perfect reference paper for photographers and historians who wish to get the 'feel' of contemporary attitudes towards the use of photography, and the status of the photographer. The paper starts:

You are now an official War Office photographer. You have had experience as a press, agency or commercial photographer. You worked as a free-lance or for a single firm; you carried out straightforward assignments usually for one specific purpose. It was your job to illustrate one particular aspect of the news...⁴⁵

The paper was sub-headed "Where Your Pictures Go", "The News Picture", "The Feature Picture-Story", "The Technical Picture", "Pictures of Allied Interest", "Exhibition Pictures", and "Pictures

for Mats and Radio Transmissions." Within these sections were 'pointers' as how best to deal with problems likely to be encountered, and advice on pictures that will have appeal. There were even aesthetic guidelines offered, such as:

You are well aware of the extra touch of drama you can sometimes infuse into a picture by shooting against the sun, by producing long shadows, by getting an unusual camera angle. If you see a chance of getting a touch of symbolism into the picture, take it.⁴⁶

The overall impression created by this document is that the MoI were having to deal with raw material of uncertain quality. The paper ends on a consoling note:

Here, then, are quite a lot of things for you to think about. But don't let them worry or confuse you. Don't be dismayed if you do not always see your pictures printed: if they are usable they will be used in scores of ways.⁴⁷

Despite the problems encountered with equipment, the calibre of recruitable photographers, and the obstacles often placed in the way of these NCO photographers and cameramen, (they were always treated as serving soldiers and could be ordered about as ordinary troops when required), they managed to produce an adequate record of much of the active combat experienced in most theatres of war from 1940 onwards, and on occasions, produced quite outstanding photography. The film and photographs taken at the time of the Falaise Pocket in Normandy in late 1944 rank with the best of any war photography of that campaign, even though in many cases, the names of the photographers would mean little to contemporary or present-day audiences.

Whilst the service units were very actively involved, there was of course much activity on the Home Front. The magazines still required material over and above the combat and action pictures, and

the press agencies and freelance photographers who were too old to be conscripted, or who were regarded as essential war workers (and so exempt from call-up) still provided the more mundane supportive material. In October, 1942, Illustrated magazine used colour photography for the first time on the cover and in the inside-feature, and continued to do so for the duration of the war. Because of the 'slowness' of colour film of the period, action pictures were not really possible, and so these covers were often portraits, landscapes, or stunt pictures set-up for the purpose. As in peacetime, they often reflected the seasons, but with war overtones. Typical examples included Land Army girls bringing in the harvest, workers in steel-mills at night, ("British Workers Make The Sparks Fly") or even sets with titles such as "War Goes To a Varsity" which showed the life of Cambridge undergraduates at war. It was still forbidden to take or publish any photographs which showed extreme weather conditions such as snow or flooding, so landscapes tended to be limited to spring and summer. The MoI set great store by such 'supportive' pictures, and formed a Features Unit of their own, with half-a-dozen staff photographers to service it. By 1943, the Ministry was issuing Feature Unit release sets, mainly in black and white, but sometimes in colour also, usually at the request of one of the MoI Divisions. These picture-stories were produced for the American Division, the Campaigns Division, and the Ministry of Agriculture amongst others, typified perhaps by a set entitled "Mrs Bugler Goes To War" issued on 20th July, 1943. This set was some eighty pictures in all, and described in these terms:

Life in an English village 50 miles from the French coast, centered around 70 years old Mrs Bugler. 47 pictures deal with the village activities, 32 show Mrs Bugler's friends and fellow villagers. The feature brings out how the village went on normally despite the German shadow across the water.⁴⁸

This particular set was photographed by Jack Bryson - other cameramen whose names appear on these sets include Richard Stone, Norman Smith, Jack Smith, and Eric Joysmith. The progress and usage of these - and indeed, all - MoI originated material was logged through a press-cuttings book kept by the Periodicals Unit in the Photographs Division throughout the war. They were used extensively, particularly the colour sets by Illustrated magazine, and by such diverse journals as The Lady, Mother and Home, The Quiver, Sketch, Sunday Pictorial, Woman's Journal, and others. In the press-cuttings book, each article was affixed, with the negative numbers noted, and the date of the reproduction appended to it. Certain sets from the Features Unit, such as one entitled "Harry Hargreaves Goes to Buckingham Palace" (which logged "the day in the life of an old workman who had received the Empire Medal"), were used extensively both at home and abroad. Not only was this cuttings-book a valuable source of reference in contemporary terms, but it now forms a priceless record of how such photographs were used and applied in the media of the time.⁴⁹

The major periodicals had by now formed their wartime character - and in documentary photography terms, this relates to Illustrated and Picture Post. Other publications, such as The Illustrated London News, were either general interest magazines, or the lower end of the market such as Everybody's which had little serious material or editorial content. Briefly, Illustrated had become a favoured 'organ' of the MoI, and by 1943 was reduced to a photo-magazine of little discernment or quality. The photography remained excellent, as was to be expected when using photographers such as James Jarcho, Jack Esten, and Reuben Saidman, but the editorial platform was non-existent, and many articles were almost

banal, typified by headlines such as "Fliers Rain Death From Limelit Sky Over A Night Sea" over some exciting pictures in colour by Jarche. Other subjects included "Our Village Goes Herb Gathering", and "Holiday in London". Despite such criticisms made in hindsight, Illustrated was a very popular magazine, with a circulation equalling that of Picture Post, and had a very clear identity. In a reader's letter appearing in Picture Post in February, 1942, this distinction was drawn:

While we appreciate the fashions in Vogue, the fashionable news of the Sphere, the entertainment of Punch, the photography of Illustrated, and Illustrated London News, we think that Picture Post contains all these features and more; it will be missed by our Forces.⁵⁰

This letter not only provides a contemporary view of the various periodicals available at that period, but offers evidence of the genuine affection and respect that Picture Post enjoyed during the war, and which was threatened in early 1942 as a result of its sustained criticism of the conduct of the war over the early years. The issue of 31st January, 1942 contained the article "Should We Stop Criticising?" and the response from the readership was an unequivocal negative. The article was captioned:

A new practice comes into being. Papers that criticise are dropped from the list of those subsidised for export by the government. There are still some in high places who would like the voices of criticism to be stilled.⁵¹

From the outset of the war, Picture Post ran into trouble with the government and the MoI, initially over the accreditation of photographers, then over the conduct of the war, the lack of war aims for a post-war Britain, and other national issues. This continued throughout the war, reaching a degree of acrimony between Tom Hopkinson and the MoI reflected in this internal memorandum from Hugh Francis dating from 1941.

If I have seemed to be unduly critical of Mr Hopkinson's remarks, I am afraid that I must plead that I have heard the same thing so often from Mr Hopkinson that I have become a little bored by him.⁵²

That Picture Post could be more accommodating is evidenced in this copy accompanying photography in the issue of 25th April, 1942:

These pictures form a triumph for British Official cameramen. We have had our disputes with the Ministry of Information. This time we pay tribute to a magnificent piece of work.⁵³

However, by 1943, they had resumed their critical stance with an article entitled "What's Wrong With The Fleet Air Arm"? which was a typical piece of radical journalism using some excellent photography.⁵⁴ The MoI did not like the attitude of Picture Post, but could do little about it. The readership was in millions, and it was a good vehicle for propaganda if and when the Hulton Press editorial staff felt like using it in that way; most of the time, they adopted a critical stance which, although in today's terms seems mild, was perhaps far less so in a time when the collective will to win was seen as sacrosanct.

The year 1943 saw the Allied invasions of Sicily and Italy, following the successful conclusion of the campaign in Tunisia earlier that year. In these ventures, the British combat photographer now became disadvantaged in comparison with his American colleagues. This was the period when documentary photographers of the calibre of Margaret Bourke-White not only visited England, but were also accredited front-line correspondent status. Her first visit to England took place in 1942, when she photographed the work of the newly-formed American Eighth Air Force for Life magazine and (the Army Air Force), and followed this with front-line coverage of the

Tunisian and Italian campaigns. Charles Gibbs-Smith, in 1944, Deputy-Director of the Photographs Division, had this to say of the status the American photographers enjoyed:

Margaret Bourke-White - an absolute winner if ever there was one - when she came over with almost a trunkload of equipment worth thousands of dollars, she got clearance by the American army to go up to the American front-line. Ours were never allowed to do that - we had blokes who were perfectly capable of taking things of the same type, but they were never allowed to get near...⁵⁵

Because of the pre-war status that photography had enjoyed in America, American photographers were rarely denied access to the combat zones, whether civilian - as in the case of Bourke-White - or military, typified by the US Signal Corps cameramen given the task of photographing unit activities for the historical record. In all arms of the American services, including the Navy and Marines, thorough and dedicated photography was carried out to a level not even envisaged in British service units. The only British cameramen allowed near the front-line were those of the AFPU, and on very rare occasions, agency photographers might also be given limited access.

The Allied information services, (and that of course applied to photography also), pooled much of their material. From 1942 onwards, there was an American presence in the United Kingdom; initially it was Eighth Army Air Force units arriving as part of the 'round-the-clock' strategic bombing offensive. Both British and American information and propaganda services - represented by the MoI and the United States Information Service (USIS) - realised that not only would this make it necessary to avoid friction between the British civilian population and the newly-arrived Americans, but equally between the British and American servicemen (the latter consideration made all the more pressing as numbers increased in

preparation for D-Day and the offensive in North-Western Europe). The MoI had formed an American Division to cope with the organisation of propaganda and information material required for that country, and the Features Unit of the Photographs Division was put to work producing picture-sets such as "Country Club for US Airmen" in July, 1943, made up of 53 photographs that:

....told the story of an old English home where American pilots rest from battle. Living accommodation, recreations, and sports. Details of the men shown are given.⁵⁶

Nicholas Pronay proposes that "the presentation of our American allies was a real problem",⁵⁷ and the role of photography was directed at "getting images right", there being few rational points to refer to in the creation of a visual concept of this form of harmonious relationship.⁵⁷ In this case, the British contribution to this photographic assignment was unlikely to be subject to much censorship. Their brief was simple, and very much in the 'getting the picture' idiom of pre-war press years. Pictures taken under this brief are in the main utterly conventional and predictable... US troops drinking English beer in country pubs, airmen handing out Hershey bars and Lifesaver sweets to English children at parties, British and American troops together at dances, queuing outside Rainbow Corner together to hear the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Orchestra... and in their way, were accepted as evidence that the allies could fight and relax together. The reality was often somewhat different, and rarely photographed - fights between coloured and white US servicemen were common - and the English could not understand nor come to terms with the discrimination exercised against the coloured troops within the American army. Equally, with British troops overseas, fears of wives

and girlfriends being lured elsewhere by the better-paid US servicemen had some credibility. By and large, the photography directed at the Anglo-American problem served its purpose - the visual image of two English-speaking peoples defending liberty and democracy together was one that most of the British population subscribed to, in the way that earlier in 1941 and 1942 they had been able to identify with Soviet Russia in terms of 'Uncle Joe', and so dedicated entire production blocks of industrial output to Russian use. In both cases, the MoI had a hand in these popular movements, and they can be accounted amongst the more successful campaigns they organised.

The years 1943 and the early part of 1944 saw the bombing offensive waged by the RAF reach its height, and brief reference to the role that photography played in this is necessary. Apart from strategic photo-reconnaissance for intelligence purposes, the RAF covered every major raid with aerial photography to assess results, and plan future target priorities. Whilst this might seem to be a functional role for photography, there were propaganda overtones. During the latter months of 1943, aircrew losses were becoming serious, and even the entire strategy of night area bombing was being questioned. In conversation with Charles Sims, an aerial photographer of pre-war eminence, who in 1940 was enrolled into the RAF, and in 1941 transferred to the air-interpretation unit at Medmenham, another facet of this apparently practical application emerged. He made this point:

I think that publication of the interpretation of the material in the press wasn't worth very much to anybody - most people couldn't interpret photographs, let alone understand them - on the other hand I think it was a tremendously important thing for the boosting of the morale of the aircrews and the fighting people. If the crew of a bomber could see the results of their efforts the day after the raid, they could feel they had done a good job.⁵⁸

The normal routine was for the aerial reconnaissance prints to be posted up on the squadron bulletin board as soon as they had been cleared through the security and interpretation process, and in this way, crews could monitor their results. So, in a diffuse fashion, even the most objective of photographs could, and did, become items of propaganda under certain circumstances. Incidentally, the American air-forces always equipped their day-bombers such as the B-17 Fortress and B-24 Liberators with strike-cameras which automatically took a series of exposure at three-second intervals so each individual crew could see the results of their own individual bombing run. In both strategic forces, the camera was being used as an instrument to maintain morale, albeit in a rather indirect manner.

In early 1944, Cecil Beaton was in the Far East, working in China and India at the behest of the MoI, taking photographs which in correspondence were described as "... a long term venture and it is therefore all the more essential that really first class negatives well processed and printed should be the result. Only in the case of action on the SEAC fronts do we look for quick publication."⁵⁹ After the success of Beaton's Middle East photo-graphy of 1942, he had agreed to visit India and China to sketch and photograph the life and people of those nations to produce some comprehensive record of that part of the Empire so far virtually ignored photographically. Again, these were not to be combat pictures, but carefully composed photographs, of contextual rather than immediate value. Beaton himself stated that he thought these Far East series amongst the best work he had ever done, and their narrative completeness is undeniable, displaying both sensitivity and passion in their individual and collective quality. In the correspondence between Beaton andd the MoI in London at this time, the tensions of the assignment are visible. In a telegram from the MoI in London to the British Embassy in Chungking in China:

We have received no reports to date except for your telegram 990 from Beaton to Francis which is inadequate and must ask you initiate them without further delay. The same lack of reporting occurred in India with the result that it was only after seeing all the prints that large gaps in coverage have been noticed. Beaton will be able to remedy these on his return to India but no such solution would be possible in regard to China. Regular reports are therefore vitally necessary and are an essential part of your responsibility for Beaton's work.⁶⁰

This communication was dated 7th June 1944, and followed earlier, less bureaucratic appeals to Beaton from Hugh Francis at the Photographs Division of the MoI such as that of 3rd April:

While of course in a tour like this for safety's sake over-taking rather than under-taking is wise, we could do with a reduction in this respect. You realise the difficulties of material and now that you are fairly accustomed to the lighting and have seen the results I think you will probably be able to cut down on duplication.⁶¹

From this letter, it was obvious that Beaton was taking too many shots of the same subject, or was he? Maybe the Fleet Street attitudes persisted in the Photographs Division, and the idea that one might use a 12-exposure roll to get one ideal photograph was still unacceptable to them. Certainly, Beaton was not known for being a profligate user of materials, and was an experienced and (by this stage) a very competent photographer. Regardless of such presumptions, the correspondence illustrates the tensions that were created by a brief being executed so far from the 'home base', with nobody on the spot to direct Beaton in his work. The MoI were adopting a cavalier attitude in such long-distance criticisms, an approach it would be hard to envisage the Americans taking in dealing with Edward Steichen in the Pacific war, or Robert Capa in North-West Europe.

By the time that D-Day occurred in June, 1944, much of the direct control of photography had slipped out of the hands of the MoI.

Primarily, the Allied war effort was now being directed towards the Continent of Europe, with field censorship becoming a renewed activity. Now, as the Allied armies advanced across Europe, American correspondents and photographers were more and more answerable to their own government and press dictates, and the role of the MoI became far more distributive and administrative than censorial. Mostly, victories and gains were now being reported - even the Ardennes offensive by the Germans in December, 1944 was only briefly censored - so, the role of maintaining morale had slipped away from the Ministry. In 1944, the Photographs Division was supplying thousands and thousands of prints for international consumption, its function being almost that of a bureaucratic darkroom. Perhaps this change in role, and even a recognition that such a change had occurred was reflected in the attitude of the Minister of Information himself at this point. Brendan Bracken - in pre-war years a young friend and confidant of Churchill - assumed the function of Minister of Information in July, 1941. Being a newspaperman himself, he quickly abandoned the idea that the role of the MoI was to maintain morale, but accepted that it could take the pulse of the nation, and monitor its 'health'. In the difficult middle years of the war, he steered the Ministry with great skill and acumen, endowing it with a respect it never enjoyed under earlier, and less competent, ministers. He understood photography, and knew its strengths and weaknesses, but really only as a newspaper proprietor. He encouraged the use of photography in its own right within the MoI, particularly in the production of film-strips, produced in their thousands, and covering a wide variety of topics - ranging from "At Sea With Britain's Navy" to "An English Village at War". These were used as educational and

information-propaganda media, each film-strip being accompanied by an MoI script, which could be read out as each image appeared on the screen. They were a cheap and effective way of bringing the war to a broad audience, particularly in rural or out-of-the-way locations. However, by 1944, the control of information and news was far more diffuse than in 1941 and 1942, and a biographer of Bracken writes:

A sense of anti-climax gradually settled on his spirit after the Allied invasion of Normandy. His secretaries and such perceptive aides as Radcliffe became increasingly conscious of the hitherto well-concealed streak of melancholy behind the 'mask of good humour and sparkle', as Grubb has termed it...Having lived from day-to-day, supervising the artificial drip-feed method of releasing no more and no less processed news than was deemed right for the British people and their friends in the outside world to receive, Brendan Bracken failed to remove his own blinkers quickly enough.⁶²

In many ways, the decline in the Minister's spirit after four long years in office was a reflection of his success. By June, 1944, the AFPU was able to field a very adequate number of stills and film cameramen, the work of which was of a far higher calibre than had been provided earlier on in the war. The civilian photographers, particularly agency men typified by Fox Photo's Reggie Speller, had the measure of the task set them within those guidelines. Even the Navy was at last able to provide good action material now that the Battle of the Atlantic was behind them, and the end of the war was in sight. The press, and in particular, the illustrated magazines had now adapted themselves to the demands of a nation at war, and even if at times still abrasive, had come to respect the MoI, and the leadership that Bracken had provided.

In the images that survive from the 1944 and 1945 years of the war, one can trace a change not only in their content, but in the

approach of the photographers themselves, whether civilian or military. Gone are the formal low-angle 'heroic' images of fighter-pilots and begrimed, blitzed civilians. The combat pictures of squadrons operating from Dutch airstrips in early 1945 are often of muddy, miserably cold airfields, with war-weary pilots and ground-crew. Now that the reality of victory was near, perhaps the reality of combat might at last be revealed. Equally, the V-bombs offensive against Southern and Eastern England of late 1944 was not treated as the earlier Blitz. The population was tired after five years of war, and to have attempted the exhortative approach of 1940 and 1941 would have been unwise. Photographs of that period - although initially captioned in a rather ambiguous manner - are far more direct and documentary in their content than those of four years earlier. Perhaps the nature of the V-bombs themselves made any attempt at subterfuge pointless; after all, the Vls were plainly visible in daytime, and unlike manned bombers, could not be shot down with the same degree of 'satisfaction'. A new reality was in the air, and the photographs of the last years of the conflict reflect that reality, finally particularised in the horrors that were recorded in the German concentration and extermination camps as they were overrun in 1945. The camera reverted to its role as a 'documenter of injustices', and in such appalling surroundings, did so with dreadful competence. For some photographers, these camps were the end of the line. George Rodger, an English photographer then working for Life magazine swore he would never take another photograph when he saw the horrors of the camps, although Margaret Bourke-White made photographs that have since been described as "...a lasting testimony to the kind of hell-on-earth that only humans can create"⁶³

The end of the war in Europe saw one final event that again involved the camera as a recorder of history. General Eisenhower had already made it clear that he would not meet the Germans in any formal surrender ceremony. Field-Marshal Montgomery was far less reluctant. Accordingly, he had every moment of the first surrender ceremony on Luneberg Heath on the 3rd May, 1945 filmed and photographed, both by civilian and AFPU photographers. In being witness to such an event, and so providing visual evidence that the surrender ceremony took place under those particular circumstances, the camera maintained its confirmatory function, albeit at the behest of a publicity and history-conscious British General.

To summarise the British contribution to documentary photography during the Second World War remains difficult. New collections of photographs still appear - many of them personal - which offer fresh evidence, and even propose alternative attitudes to events represented or portrayed. The era was one in which official control and censorship was applied to the production of photographs, and these restrictions were to a great extent accepted and upheld both by photographers and the public.

As a result of these wartime contingencies, it was inevitable that there would be omissions in the photographic coverage, and these remained in areas of obvious moral and social concern. Corpses were rarely photographed - for example after air-raids - and the ban on photography of 'riotous and disorderly assemblies' ensured that few photographs were ever taken of strikes or strikers, or of street-fighting between white and coloured American servicemen.

Perhaps it is through the style of photography adopted by British photographers, rather than in its content, that a more

discernable weakness can be identified. In the latter part of the war, despite the influx of American photographers with their more relaxed and progressive approach to photography, many British photographers still clung to their pre-war VN or Goerz-Anschutz press cameras. It was almost as though the Leica had never existed. The German Army PK photographers were using Leicas in Poland in 1939, yet in 1945, the British AFPU cameramen were still using their folding Zeiss Super-Ikontas they had been issued with three years previously. Even the US Signal Corps cameramen were given specially-manufactured Kodak 35mm miniature cameras in 1945, so the British alone struggled on with outdated and unsuitable equipment. Constraints of this type had considerable impact, not only on the photographer's ability to get near the action, but also in terms of composition and framing. The 'modern' look of a print from a 35mm negative was in part due to the greater depth of field offered by the short focal length of lens. In contrast, the 5 ins x 4 ins plate-camera produced a very different style of image - in which, for example, a standing figure was detached totally from the background by the limited depth-of-field of large-format lens design. Equally, whilst one could fit a 250mm telephoto lens on to a Leica or Contax, which was of far greater focal length than the normal 50mm lens, such lenses were not feasible on plate-cameras, and equally restricted on the rollfilm cameras of the period. Such technical constraints did not directly hamper the taking of a photograph, but they did affect the style in which the image was framed and realised, and affected the visual vocabulary offered by the style adopted. A German PK cameraman could in 1943 take as many as 250 consecutive photographs on a Leica with a bulk-film holder and clockwork film advance motor-attachment. This facility was by and

large denied British photographers, which resulted in the German work displaying narrative and sequential power often lacking in British photographs. In viewing the contact-sheets of AFPU cameramen in Europe, their inability to get long-shots of action is obvious, primarily due to the restrictions of their equipment. This was also compounded by the reluctance of the military to allow photographers into the combat zone, although this problem was often ignored or circumvented in the field. In technical constraints of this nature, despite their best efforts and attentions, the British photographer was often working at a disadvantage when compared with his allies - or with his enemies. A final technical consideration related to the fact that whilst Germany had a strong camera and material manufacturing base, the British expertise was limited to technical and aerial equipment. Whilst this had obvious advantages in reconnaissance work - in which both the Germans and the Americans lagged far behind the British, both in application and interpretation - it did make problems of equipment and supply a constant source of concern to the British authorities.

The final consideration to be assessed relates to the status of the photographer in Britain, both socially and aesthetically. The war saw little real change in such attitudes - the photographer being either viewed as a tradesman or an artist by the MoI. If he was a tradesman, he would probably be an ex-Fleet Street or agency cameraman, and would become a sergeant in a service unit, or put on the staff of the Photographs Division of the MoI. This might reflect the photographic output of the service units when viewed in contrast with the commissioned work of Bill Brandt and Cecil Beaton - who were put in a more exclusive category than the 'tradesmen' of Fleet Street.

They remained civilians, operating under MoI orders, and provided a contextual view of the war, similar to that provided by the War Artists such as John Piper. They were dealt with as 'artists', although in Beaton's case, he still felt the administrative crack of the whip if he failed to conform. In the case of Humphrey Spender and Charles Sims, (both of whom had photographic reputations before the war), their names had been officially recognised, and they were given officer status within the Army and Air Force respectively. In that sense, they were dealt with as 'gentlemen', rather than as 'artists' or 'tradesmen'. The remaining civilian photographers remained by and large, news, press, or commercial photographers. They included the ubiquitous James Jarche, and good commercial photographers such as Hans Wild (a conscientious objector, who was still allowed to take photographs), plus the press agency men such as Reggie Speller who for one reason or another were exempt from military service.

British documentary photography in 1945 was, in retrospect, little advanced from that of 1939. Unlike the film movement, which displayed broadening scope and content, still-photography seemed locked into cliches and identities that had their origins in pre-war attitudes to the medium, and from which it seemed incapable of escaping, despite the documentary possibilities offered by the war as an event of enormous importance.

In evaluating the photography of this period, it becomes necessary to bring together the various tensions which affected its practice and application, and to view such images in the photographic and historical context within which they were placed. These tensions include technical and creative constraints inherent in the making or taking of the photograph, and contextual conditions effecting its application and dissemination.

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Chapter Five - Origination and Commission - Part One

By its very existence, any photograph can be attributed a documentary value. Gus Macdonald writes of this quality in these terms:

Every photograph is in some sense a document. It can indicate the cultural influences or technical factors in the making of the image. A subject's dress or stance, location or expression, can imply social conditions or individual attitudes. Occasionally, a photograph appears to offer irrefutable visual evidence, an authenticated trace of a past event which invites social investigators to practise their forensic skills.¹

The ability of the photograph to 'essentialise' and perhaps, by implication to stereotype or even trivialise - has been referred to by many writers and students of photography. Within this ability of the photograph to capture a moment in time lies its greatest power to inform and illuminate, matched by an equal ability to distort and misrepresent. This facility of the medium is discussed at length by Harold Evans in the volume devoted to Pictures on a Page in a series on editing and design published in 1978. Having established that "the camera cannot lie, but can be an accessory to untruth", Evans expands his argument into the human thirst for authentication - "...one need we seem to have mid-way between intellect and emotion: an ache for visual confirmation."² He then goes on to discuss in detail how such human desires become most compelling when viewing photographs which claim to convey actuality - in particular, the news or press photograph:

...the still news picture, isolating a moment of time has an affinity with the way we remember. It is easier for us, most of the time, to recall an event or a person by summoning up a single image. In our mind's eye we can concentrate on a single image more easily than a sequence of images. And the single

image can be rich in meaning because it is a trigger image of all the emotions aroused by the subject. If you think of major news events, the likelihood is that you will visualise not a cine-sequence but a single scene from a single news photograph which has been absorbed in the mind.³

In discussion with Gail Buckland over methods by which we might structure the viewing of photographs as evidence, she proposed that "we must 'read' photographs. It is no good just looking at them; the only way we can read them is to understand the context within which they were taken".⁴ Furthermore, people who select photographs to represent or illustrate events in history, or to make social or human comment, should display an equal responsibility in their choice. "The person who selects photographs has a great responsibility. Can we rewrite our history by using alternative images?"⁵

Such concerns over the value of the photograph as evidence have formed the background for much discussion over recent years, perhaps stimulated by the publication of Susan Sontag's book On Photography in 1977. This important collection of essays is an attempt by this American writer and critic to establish some guidelines by which the diffuse medium of photography might be re-assessed as a communication method of social relevance. Very early in the book, Sontag claims:

A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture.⁶

She goes on to qualify this by saying:

After the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed.⁷

It is this retroactive power of the photograph to represent the past that endorses its claim as evidence, but it does not necessarily imbue it with any credibility as visual history. For that dimension to be added, the image in itself is not enough, and authentication of a more literal kind is essential. The need for literary or verbal support appears irrefutable - particularly in terms of authentication of time and place, and the popular concept that "seeing is believing" is no longer acceptable when the photograph is used as a historical reference point. Contextual information is required if the maximum amount of visual data is to be obtained from the photograph, especially if viewed in technical or scientific terms. The physical conditions surrounding the making of the photograph, its origination, and intended application at the moment of being taken are all contributing factors in the amount of information a photograph may reveal to the viewer. Deductions arrived at, or opinions expressed, without attention to such factors will be incomplete or misleading, particularly when photographic images intended for, or reproduced in, the printed media are being studied. Referring again to Sontag, the implications in her writing that relate to the documentary idea in photography are clear:

Socially concerned photographers assume that their work can convey some kind of stable meaning, can reveal truth. But partly because the photograph is, always, an object in a context, this meaning is bound to drain away: that is, the context, which shapes whatever immediate - in particular, political - uses the photograph may have is inevitably succeeded by contexts in which such uses are weakened and become progressively less relevant.⁸

When utilising the photograph as a document in the historical sense, further considerations merit attention. Perceptions about our

lives - which in turn relate to our immediate past - have been inextricably bound up with visual imagery, much of it photographic. Our views of twentieth century history are often based upon photographs which have been presented as evidence or as "certificates of presence".⁹ In John Berger's words, "the camera relieves us of the burden of memory", and so we may become over-dependent upon such images as some form of visual shorthand to alleviate the need for a scholarly or dedicated examination of historical events and their importance.¹⁰ The art-historian, Ian Jeffrey claims that "photographs create an independent mythology, independent of history", and further proposes that "a dispassionate and objective view of history is a fiction - it's not possible - it's a myth. All we can do is study the history of our myths - that's what photography is for".¹¹ Such concerns reflect a contemporary unease with the photograph as a definitive visual document, a view echoed by Professor Arthur Marwick, who, in the introduction to his book, The Home Front, writes:

Photographs are silent witnesses, but very far from unbiased ones; they show only what cameramen chose, or were asked to record.¹²

A structure for a form of critical analysis of the documentary photograph could be developed if proposed under three main headings:

CONTENT

STYLE

CONTEXT

In examining these headings, the need to inter-relate one to the other should not be overlooked, and the sequence and weighting of value will vary, dependent upon the criteria being adopted by which the photograph is being examined.

CONTENT - related to the subject that formed the image, and the data 'held' therein. Considerations of costume, dress, artifacts, and industrial progress might be of value, also the concept of 'the dating of the photograph by visual content alone' as a visual form of analysis in the absence of other confirmatory information. If possible, factors conditioning the content of the photograph should also be considered, particularly in terms of constraints that might have affected the role of the photographer in the forming of such content.

STYLE - related to the manner in which the content was observed, contrived, and recorded. All matters relating to photographic technology and current attitudes to aesthetic judgements prevailing at the period of the photograph should be examined. Of equal validity would be the establishment of the style and origin of the photograph, both in terms of the individual photographer, and of a collective identity or genre.

CONTEXT - related to the manner by which the photograph was originated, assigned, or commissioned. To take account of specific and general circumstances surrounding the making of the photograph, in terms of intent and motivation. To consider the intended audience, and the effect of the image upon such an audience. To appreciate the institutions and assumptions surrounding any application of the photograph in contemporary terms, and the likelihood of control or censorship being exercised on the photograph in terms of content, style or application.

In proposing such a form of analysis, it might be necessary to be aware of emotive or purely aesthetic considerations as a factor under certain conditions. Many photographs of great historical value are aesthetically poor, their content alone qualifying their relevance and recognition. Equally, images of great graphic strength and aesthetic power may be of less documentary and historical value, yet which have qualities of style which merit attention.¹³

To make deductions or draw conclusions from any photograph without accounting for the craft and practical aspects of the medium denies the photographer the right to serious analysis. In the field of documentary photography, to abstract the image from the production process ignores the rationale by which it was originated. Unlike the painter, illustrator, or journalist, the documentary photographer has to 'be there', and this suggests an element of actuality in the very act of taking a photograph. The journalist and writer James Cameron has said - "My experience is that photographers are the most truthful people in the world, because with very few exceptions they cannot manipulate their environment as a reporter can" - and in time of war and human conflict, such considerations become of paramount importance. ¹⁴

Chapter Five - Origination and Commission - Part Two

The Ministry of Information was a hybrid organisation in photographic terms. Initially created as a clearing-house for the many forms of photographic material which would require scrutiny and approval prior to publication, by the end of the war, it had developed into a highly-sophisticated photographic library, and both commissioned and originated its own photography and production processes.

Such enterprises all fell under the 'Official Photography' umbrella, the hallmark of which was that the photograph had been originated, sponsored, or commissioned through the MoI Photographs Division, either in response to external ministerial requests, initiated on an internal basis, or produced by one of the many official and service units operating under wartime conditions. The co-operation between the MoI Photographs Division and other government and official bodies was developed to a high level of efficiency, whether the required photographs were informational, educational, or promotional in nature and status.

The sheer variety of commissioned and official material is considerable, ranging from the record photograph to the emotively-structured propaganda image. All the work produced under this official impetus capitalised upon pre-war traditions and professional attitudes inherent within British photography. Much of the record photography was produced by ex-commercial photographers, now in uniform in the AFPU, or in civilian guise in the MoI Features Unit. Press work continued also, with many ex-Fleet Street cameramen impressed into the service and War Office units. Much of this was

'set-up' in the pre-war tradition of the feature or general interest photograph, although the actuality or event photograph still appeared regularly, particularly as the war progressed, and the 'news' became more reportable in visual terms, and censorship relaxed. Finally, the pre-war photographers with national and international reputations (such as Cecil Beaton and Bill Brandt) were officially commissioned as freelance or co-opted official photographers to turn their particular eye on the war effort, often with a purely propaganda application in mind.

The methods by which photographs were officially originated is an amalgam of pre-war photographic traditions and practice allied to defined concepts of the role of the camera - as a recording tool, as an informational instrument, or as a method by which documentary and persuasive images might be created. In the examples offered in the following pages, such tensions may be discerned and analysed in the forms in which such photographs would have been issued during the war years. As in contemporary practice, the captions have been presented with the photograph to form a total visual entity, and to reflect the undeniable inter-relationship between the words and the picture.



Plate 1

TYPES OF PROTECTIVE GOGGLES
USED IN THE SERVICES AND INDUSTRY

'Anti-flare goggle for respirator face-pieces'

This photograph typifies the technical record form of imagery produced in thousands throughout the war. Taken from the Ministry of Supply albums - of which there are 13 in the IWM archive, numbering some 2000 photographs in all - it is one of a series of technical record photographs illustrating a series of protective eye-wear. The negative is a glass-plate of the 'half-plate' size popular in that period, measuring 6 1/2 x 4 3/4 inches. This indicates a studio setting for the picture, underlined by the formal lighting, limited area of depth-of-field evident in the photograph, and the fact that all the pictures use the same person with identical lighting and posing. Using such a large negative ensured technically accurate rendition, obviated the need for enlargements - a contact print to virtually the size of that presented would be adequate for reference - and meant that the photographer could standardise his or her working technique to a minimum.

The technical nature of the caption endorses the purely record nature of the picture, and no trace of any such photographs in published form can be found in the MoI Photographs Division Periodicals Unit guard-books of the period, which indicates the purely reference intent behind the origination of such photographs. They bear no evidence of censorship, primarily because if not intended for publication, they would not need to be submitted for approval. This most basic form of photographic practice follows the industrial practice of pre-war years, in which components or products would be catalogued and recorded with the camera. Probably taken by either a MoI Photographs Division 'in-house' photographer, or commissioned by

them on behalf of the Ministry of Supply or Ministry of Production - and taken by a civilian operative on that basis - they provide a clear example of the fundamental and undemonstrative nature of much wartime photography.

The entire album set covers many fields of production and supply, including weaponry, military and civilian equipment, munitions, and war materials such as clothing and engineering products. They provide an interesting and 'alternative' view to the propaganda images of war, often being couched in informational or illustrative terms. When and where people are involved, the rather pedantic approach of the photographers is in contrast to the demonstrative view often displayed in the press and editorial media of the period.



Plate 2

STILL-LIFE OF RATIONS FOR A WEEK

'An example of what a family of three could spend their 60 points on, in the four-week period'

This second record photograph displays changes in emphasis from the first example. It is an MoI produced photograph in that it appears in the 'D' series of photographs in the IWM archive - which were devoted to the Home Front. It is almost certainly taken in the MoI Photographs Division studio in London, which was set up in the early years of the war to carry out this form of record work, and the photographer was possibly one of the five staff cameramen recruited to the Features Unit to produce picture-stories for editorial use. Often, however, they had to produce industrial or similar work if required to do so, and this photograph bears all the hallmarks of a rushed and probably short-term solution to an urgent request for a photograph. The arrangement of the items is haphazard and casually placed, the lighting is economical and very simple, and little attention has been given to the surface on which the items are placed, or to the background. Accompanying this print is another, in which the background has been opaqued out on the negative, so that the items are silhouetted against a white ground. There is no denying the fact that the composition, arrangement, and lighting of this group are of a mediocre nature.

This style of record photograph differs fundamentally from the first example in that it was intended for publication - the caption tells us that - and so had emphases of a promotional and propaganda value inherent within it. Jane Carmichael, in discussing this photograph, pointed out that as such images were aimed at the public domain, and although couched in photographically 'record' terms, their intended aim and audience transmuted them into what can only be

regarded as propaganda photographs.¹⁵ In this case, the original photograph was probably requested by the Ministry of Food, but might equally have been initiated by a Division within the MoI a part of a promotional campaign to remind the public that although the war was nearing its end, rationing would continue.

By being taken on a large-format negative - half-plate as in the previous example - details of print and packaging are clearly readable. For the present-day researcher, such factors make these images interesting in a different manner to those surrounding their origination. In the unwitting content of this pack-shot are design and packaging details now of archival interest. The diet displayed may be of value to those involved in social history and the development of nutritional studies, and the style of the image itself is of interest to the photographic historian. Viewed with all the other photographs of a similar nature in the 'D' series of albums - whether of utility clothing, ration-books, or furniture - they offer an unrivalled source of information and visual evidence.



Plate 3

79TH ARMoured DIVISION TRIALS,
ISLE OF WIGHT,
RECORDS ONLY

Photographer, Sergeant Laing

Although remaining within the record approach to photography, this next illustration offers further insights into the practice of photography in wartime. Initially produced for record purposes - but with intended historical relevance - they were nevertheless subject to total military censorship at the time of their origination. The subjects of the photographs are the various pieces of specialised armoured equipment designed to overcome German beach defences in the landings in Normandy in the late spring of 1944. Whilst these vehicles were under trial, War Office Photographers were directed to take a comprehensive series of progress shots, of which this page is a selection. For obvious security reasons, prior to the D-Day landings, such photographs were totally prohibited from circulation, but once the landings had taken place, and the success of the vehicles had been assured, they were gradually released for publication, as can be seen here. As a picture is cleared, the 'For Records Only' caption is deleted, and a 'Released' stamp superimposed upon it.

The photographer who took these series of pictures was probably a War Office cameraman attached to the military units and given ranking, in addition to the AFPU film cameramen who also attended the trials. This was often the case when a special event had to be covered which involved military units as such, but was carried out under War Office auspices. The negatives are the standard rollfilm 6 x 6 cms, which indicates that Sergeant Laing would have been using the Zeiss Super-Ikonta folding camera which was standard issue to all War Office and Army personnel involved in still

photography. The strangeness of this new armoured equipment led an AFPU film-cameraman to write:

But during that time I was whisked away to do some Top Secret filming in the Isle of Wight. This involved the many new uses of tanks with some extraordinary additions such as new type flails...¹⁶

These record-cum-progress photographs are a strange combination of disciplines. Taken for record, yet with a sense of archival value in such a commission, they were initially prohibited from publication, yet by their gradual release, became a part of the official government information process. They now provide a source of military interest to students of war and technology alike, perhaps fulfilling their original remit in an exemplary manner.

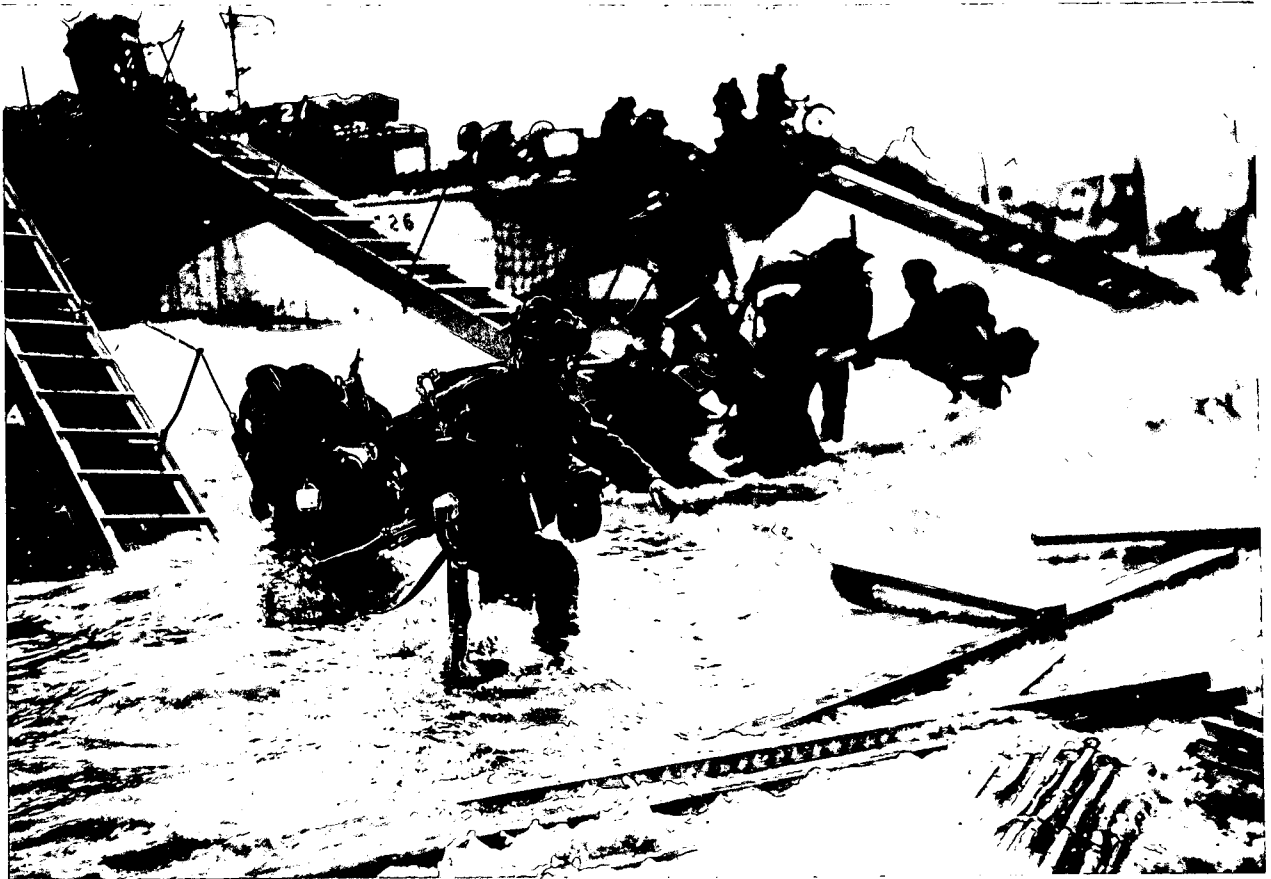


Plate 4

'Royal Marine Commando troops making their way ashore.
One is carrying a small motor-cycle'

4th Special Service Brigade HQ,
St. Aubin-sur-Mer

Photographer, Lieut. Handford AFPU

The actuality of the Normandy landings was a very different event to each individual who took part in them. The British were fortunate to have relatively light opposition, and so, the images that endure from the British aspect of the event are in contrast to the emotive and aesthetically exciting alternatives from the American beaches where opposition was sustained and bloody. To propose that any photograph is a 'real' representation of an event of this magnitude is a dubious claim to make, yet within this actuality photograph of a unit landing that day there can be traced those elements of reality that endow any documentary image with validity.

The personnel within the frame of the viewfinder are believable and ordinary, the photograph has little of the rhetoric evident in Robert Capa's swirling drama on the American beaches. Yet it has integrity in its very 'ordinariness'. The tin-mug on one soldiers' hip, the steel-rimmed spectacles on the foreground figure are the antithesis of heroism and the glory of war. Even the Corgi motor-cycles seem to be the cause of trouble as they have to be manhandled through the surf. They are not professional warriors, but the civilians in uniform that they obviously are, trying to come to terms with a difficult and extraordinary event in their lives. The photographer, Lieutenant Peter Handford, was one of the AFPU teams that went ashore that day to make a record of the British landings, amongst whom was also Ian Grant, who wrote of his experiences:

My camera had been running up to the moment we came to a shuddering halt.....then I got a hefty push from the Commando behind me and I was on my backside, thumping down the ramp into about two feet of water. Hastily judging the light conditions I made a slight

aperture adjustment, then backed off from the cover of the AVRE, started the camera running on the trio whose attention was now diverted in the direction I planned to pick up the shots of Commandos coming ashore.

In the coverage of the D-Day landings by Handford, Grant, Mapham and others, we have an honest and comprehensive set of images, both movie and still.¹⁷ Their role was that of combat soldiers who were trained and expected to take photographs. With the inadequate folding Zeiss Super-Ikontas, they managed to provide a documentary record of that day's events, often presented in almost prosaic visual terms. They knew they were not great photographers - they never claimed to be - but they had a sense of occasion, and were able to realise some excellent photography by their sheer doggedness and basic competence with their craft.



Plate 5

DARBY AND JOAN WAR WORKERS

'700,000 old age pensioners have braced themselves for fresh effort and gone into war work with a swing. The pretty village of Manuden, Essex, has a whole community of old age pensioners working on the land. Amongst them Mary Hannah Debnam and (Hubby) Hubert Debnam, both 67'

Photographer unknown

The previous photograph not only provides a visual record - however partial - of an historic event, but does so in actuality terms. This next image lacks any such integrity, and offers a contrived and cliched view of the Home Front, in which the official concepts of 'pulling together' and 'winning through' are essentialised in visual terms. A product of the MoI Photographs Division, it is a precursor of the Features Unit sets of photographs and captions issued from early 1943 onwards in ever-increasing quantities.

Such feature-sets were taken of a wide-range of subjects, typified by the examples given by Jane Carmichael when writing:

In a typical week in January 1944 Jack Bryson took photographs of a new rehabilitation centre for wounded servicemen in London, recorded the arrival of some scarce sponges from Turkey, took some portrait shots at the Foreign Office of visiting diplomats, and photographed the Surrey Docks for the Ministry of Supply.¹⁸

Those responsible for such photographs were in the main ex-newspaper photographers, often from the provinces, who were schooled in the pre-war tradition of 'getting the picture'. Unlike the magazine photographers such as Bert Hardy and Thurston Hopkins (both in the AFPU and RAF respectively during the war), these newsmen were unable to break from the tradition of the single photograph, and many of these resulting feature-sets are without narrative content and journalistic flair. The tone of the captions reflects the curious exhortations of much of the MoI-initiated Home Front material of the early to mid-war years, and seems to echo the contrived low-angle style of photography, seemingly inherited from Grierson documentary films of the 1930s, in which the common man was endowed with dignity by being photographed from ground level!

These images remain elusive in their placement and integrity. Although borrowing certain documentary styles, they are clearly intended as persuasive images, designed (with their captions) for editorial use to promote and sustain the official concept of a nation at war pulling together for the common good. Upon examination, they are neither promotional nor documentary - they are a hybrid form of editorial photography in which appearances are real, but which we can now recognise as contrived and ambiguous. Perhaps they are a product of war in themselves - in which an attempt has been made to produce an actuality from a fabricated situation for considerations which extend far beyond the power and ability of the camera. Their value in this study lies in their style and visual vocabulary, which extends far beyond the content displayed within the image, and which forms the context for their analysis in both application and propaganda terms.



Plate 6

AUSTRALIANS STORM A GERMAN STRONG POINT

'Through a dense smoke screen which hid their movements from the enemy, the Australians approached the strong point ready to rush in from different sides'

Photographer, Sergeant Chetwyn, AFPU

This celebrated photograph poses the classic problem when deciphering the meaning and content of any war photograph - that of authenticity. When published on 27th November, 1942, this photograph was captioned:

CHARGING TO VICTORY IN EGYPT - a photograph taken amid the dust and noise of the terrific battle that began on October 23rd, and radiod to London from Cairo. It shows Australian troops, covered by a smokescreen, advancing to the assault of an enemy strong-point which has put up a stubborn resistance. Attacked on all sides, taken too by surprise, the defenders surrendered before it came to the bayonet.¹⁹

The photograph was actually taken by an AFPU cameraman on 3rd November, 1942, some ten days following the battle of El Alamein, and is now believed to be a photograph taken behind the lines of troops in training. Both Jorge Lewinski and Ian Grant dismiss this famous war image as being a contrived and set-up situation, for example:

What some people may not realise is that many later film sequences and stills pictures were studiously faked and passed off as the real thing.²⁰

Lewinski is more specific:

One of the best-known pictures of the desert war, prominently displayed in the entrance to the Imperial War Museum, of a Desert Rat running into battle with a pistol in his hand is rated by most as a skilful reconstruction of a scene which nevertheless was a common occurrence in the war in North Africa.²¹

The question raised by this image is simple. Does the doubted authenticity of the photograph deny its contemporary propaganda value, or propose a falsehood by its possible contrivance? In terms of the

first case, it served its purpose as a dramatic image of war at a time when any victory of arms was of value both to the government and the nation. As such, its contemporary strength is undeniable, and in a sense, is now part of our visual history. However, with the knowledge of hindsight, it cannot be viewed as the actuality image it originally claimed to be, and so must be re-assessed as a documentary photograph. Provided that the realities it claims to portray are seen in representational terms - as an illustration of how things were, rather than as a confirmed evidence of an actual event - then its relevance remains intact. Aesthetically, it is powerful and effective, offering the viewer an emotional view of war as a staged, theatrical event. In terms of information, it is empty and limited in its appeal, implying much, yet offering little more than a promise or portrayal of an event in rhetorical terms.



Plate 7

LONDON AIR-RAID SHELTER

'East End Church Crypt'

Photographer, Bill Brandt

This photograph, taken by Bill Brandt, is one of a series commonly referred to as his Shelter Photographs. Produced at the behest of the MoI Photographs Division, they are a prime example of the commissioned photograph from an eminent civilian photographer whose individual talent and ability was recognised and sponsored on an official basis. Approached by Hugh Francis - the Director of the Photographs Division - Brandt worked over a period of nights in November and December, photographing those taking refuge in underground shelters, using his Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex camera, often using flashbulbs for illumination.

Immediately effective in propaganda terms - Wendell Wilkie, the Republican candidate from the U.S.A. took a portfolio of these photographs back to show President Roosevelt - they were later published in Lilliput magazine, and acclaimed by one critic remarking that Brandt was "working with an awareness of European surrealism and the British romantic pictorial tradition".²² Whatever the aesthetic judgements of the time, they endure as great documentary images, reinforced by accurate captions which endorse the time, date, and place of their origin, and enhanced in retrospect by their tolerance and sympathy inherent in many of the series.

Many criticisms can be levelled at the way in which the British failed to appreciate the power of the camera as a medium of persuasion and information in the early years of the war. These images of Brandt's illustrate that great photography could be sponsored and published, and that there were those in authority who

In recognising the individual and particular talents of this fine photographer, the MoI was able to produce images that not only had immediate and telling propaganda value, but which because of their great creative integrity and quality, were also historical documents of great stature and permanence. Viewed in hindsight, their human quality remains unimpaired, and by their being so controlled and understated, they also offer an alternative view of a nation at war to the exhortative and jarring imagery with which this period of the Blitz is so often identified.

Finally, this image is a fine example of a short-term propaganda application, required to fulfil immediate communication needs, yet which in retrospect has acquired a value and relevance which far exceeds its original remit and intent.



Plate 8

'Mountain Scenery and a Blossoming
Tung Tree, on the Road to Lung Chuan'.

Spring 1944

This single, and particularly composed photograph is one of many hundreds taken by Cecil Beaton in India and China in 1944. In contrast to the previous photograph by Bill Brandt, here is Beaton working under a formal commission from the MoI to "gather material on these under-publicised theatres of war".²³ This commission was not to produce immediately-usable propaganda pictures, but to produce a form of dossier with a longer time-scale - not only in terms of the amount of time required to complete a comprehensive photo-coverage - but also as a piece of work with archival and historical value. Despite this fairly flexible brief, Beaton was promptly admonished if he did not produce the work in the wartime style and format, witnessed in telegrams sent to him from London:

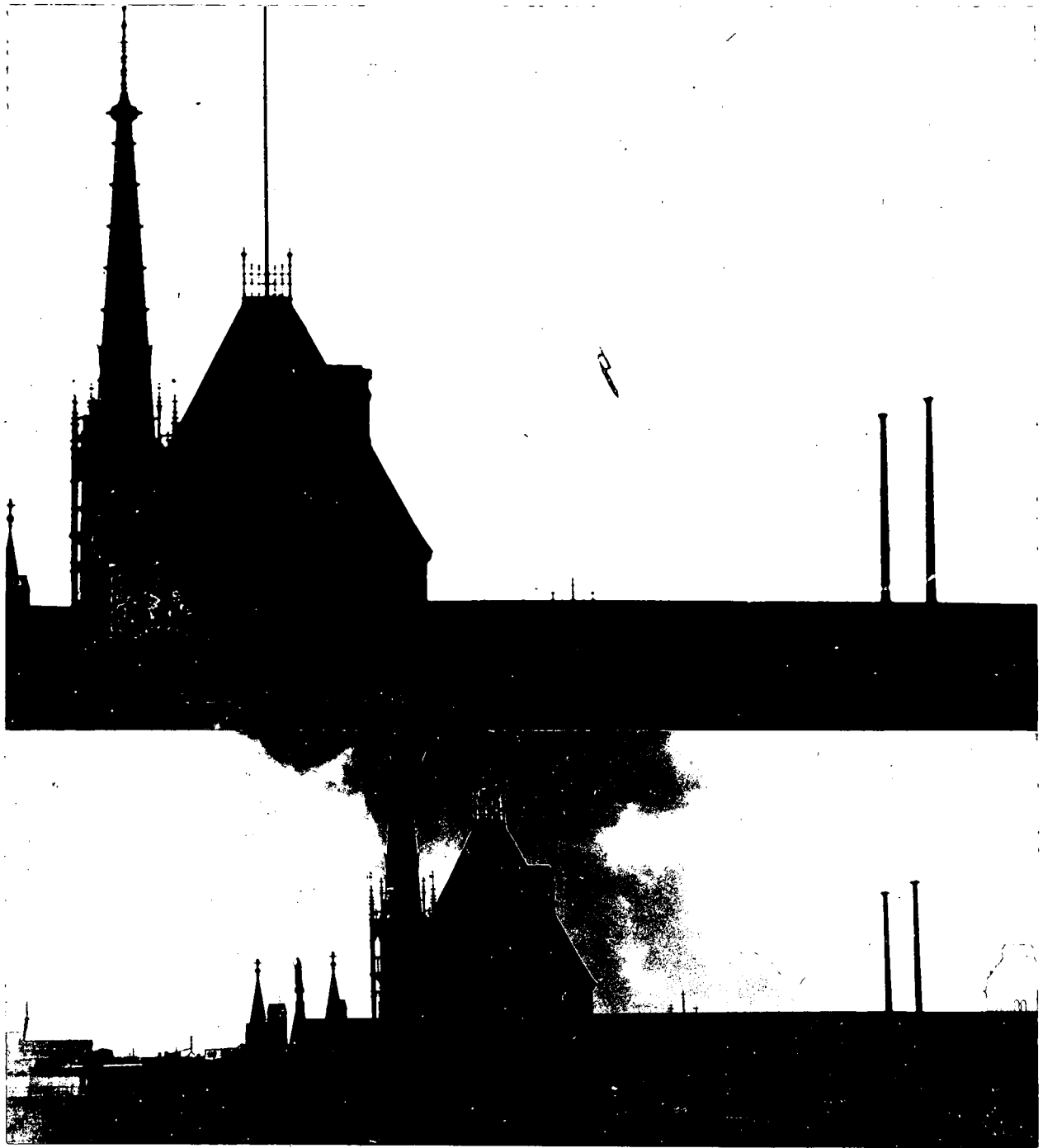
While captioning is adequate, more detail on captions of Chinese pictures would be appreciated.²⁴

Beaton's pre-war photography had always been in a fine-art or what was then referred to as a 'salon' style. He was always responsive to visually compelling situations, and whether working in a shipyard or in the Western Desert, seemed to formalise and even construct his compositions. This approach is discussed by Gail Buckland, writing in a recent compilation of Beaton's war photographs:

He loved to photograph, to put a frame around an aspect of the world he found intriguing. He was fascinated with patterns and shapes, gestures and faces, and with his perceptive eye was able to translate subtle details into vivid pictures.²⁵

Beaton alone enjoys the reputation of having his work catalogued under his own name in the IWM photographic archives. Accredited with the title of 'Special Photographer', he worked throughout the war on a variety of wartime MoI assignments, and was accredited a level of access and facility denied to many other photographers. This was not because of his social standing, but was a recognition that he was probably Britain's best-known photographer, and possibly also the most capable. With Brandt, he shares not only the devotion to the Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex camera, but a creative-based attitude to picture-making that distances their work from their contemporaries, few of whom had either their talent or dedication.

Rather ironically, or perhaps suitably, original prints from both Brandt and Beaton may still be ordered from the IWM Photographs Department Library at the standard commercial rate of 75p for a 5" x 7" enlargement. The recent growth of the gallery industry in photography often places these photographers' other work out of reach of most people - a Brandt print can fetch £300 or more if auctioned - yet these war images, officially-commissioned, may still be ordered at a minimal price by merely quoting the official negative number over the telephone.



Plates 9 & 10

'Air-raid damage. Photograph taken from a Fleet Street roof-top showing a Flying Bomb actually crashing in Central London in a side-road off Drury Lane'.

Photographer unknown

This double-photograph was issued to the MoI for approval in the autumn of 1944, and appeared in The War Illustrated of 13th October. Accompanied by an emotive caption - 'London's Head Was Bloody But Unbowed', it is representative of much of the actuality press photography of the war years.²⁶ Taken by an Associated Press cameraman, and released through the Photographic News Agency Limited, the prints submitted here are copies made from the original filed with the MoI Photographs Division Library. The rapidity with which these images must have been taken in sequence, and the quality of the prints themselves suggests they may have been taken on a 35mm or medium-format (6 x 6 cms negative size) camera. The top photograph has obviously been enlarged to clarify the V1 diving, and the grain structure and perspective indicates a long-focus lens, not usually found on the large plate press cameras of the period.

Such pictures are hard to find in publications of the late-summer and autumn of 1944. Initially, the existence of the V1s was subject to censorship, but they were impossible to deny when seen trailing their flame-trails across the sky, and yet images of their damage and regularity of descent were rare. By the time this picture was published, the attitude of the MoI towards the public's ability to bear disquieting information had altered. No longer were such events presented in exhortative terms, and the example quoted above was the exception rather than the rule.

This photograph - really devoid of any great aesthetic merit - still offers firm evidence of an actual event. It is little more than

an instinctive reaction by the photographer to the event that was presented in front of his lens, yet we may assume he was placed in such a position with the hope or intent that such an event might occur. The straightforward form in which the caption is written is in contrast to those evident in the Blitz photography of some three years earlier, the 'somewhere in England' vagueness now avoided. It perhaps demonstrates the manner in which the onset of victory, or at least, the certainty that defeat for the Germans was now inevitable tended to make the presentation of war news and events a more realistic and mature enterprise. Also, the currency of such press pictures must have been limited. At this stage in the war, the public who knew what a V1 looked and sounded like were jaded and unresponsive to the propaganda tirades of earlier years. In these circumstances, photographs were used economically and prudently. In the magazines and newspapers of this period of the war, the manner in which the flying-bombs were dealt with as a nuisance - albeit an insistent and destructive one - was reflected in a very detached and informational use of photography, virtually all of which originated from press sources.



Plate 11

'Her Majesty the Queen visits
a WVS Reception Nursery'

Press photographs of a supportive nature in wartime often were undistinguishable from pre-war pictures, except in the context within which they were originated. In this example, in which the Queen is visiting a nursery, there is little to identify it as a war situation, or indeed a wartime photograph. Nevertheless, such pictures were a staple diet of much of the illustrated press, re-affirming the idea that it was a people's war, and doing so within an established photographic vocabulary with which the audience would be familiar.

It is an unremarkable photograph, yet has much to commend it. Issued by the Westminster Press group of provincial newspapers - a clearing house for much photographic material of this nature - it is natural, unposed, and almost candid in its approach. It has a snapshot quality, the sharpness of the print is poor, the image is roughly-framed by the photographers' viewfinder, and it has all the hallmarks of a 'snatched' photograph. Yet all the faces are full of life and activity, and the feeling of the entire photograph is one of enjoyment and informality.

Such images are an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of a nation at war. Although couched in these rather undemanding press styles of photography, they offer a relief from the official portrayal of posed groups of royalty and politicians endlessly touring factories and military bases. As in today's photography, the newspaper and press cameramen remained the journeymen of the medium, taking pictures where asked or told to do so, often of mundane or repetitive subjects, always without the access and privilege of the official photographers operating under government patronage and support.

Being by nature gregarious, they were also surprisingly self-effacing in their professional activities. As in this case, their names were seldom, if ever credited to their pictures, the credit usually going to the agency or newspaper who employed them. For this reason alone, their work has rarely been collated into recognisable albums or monographs of their photography, with the rare exceptions of Reginald Speller and James Jarcho - who by this period had to some degree become a press 'celebrity' in his own right.²⁷

Such persistent and reliable practitioners of photography deserve better attention than they have received to date, for they turned their cameras onto the audience as much as towards the performers, and so enriched the total library of visual material which is now available for research and selection.

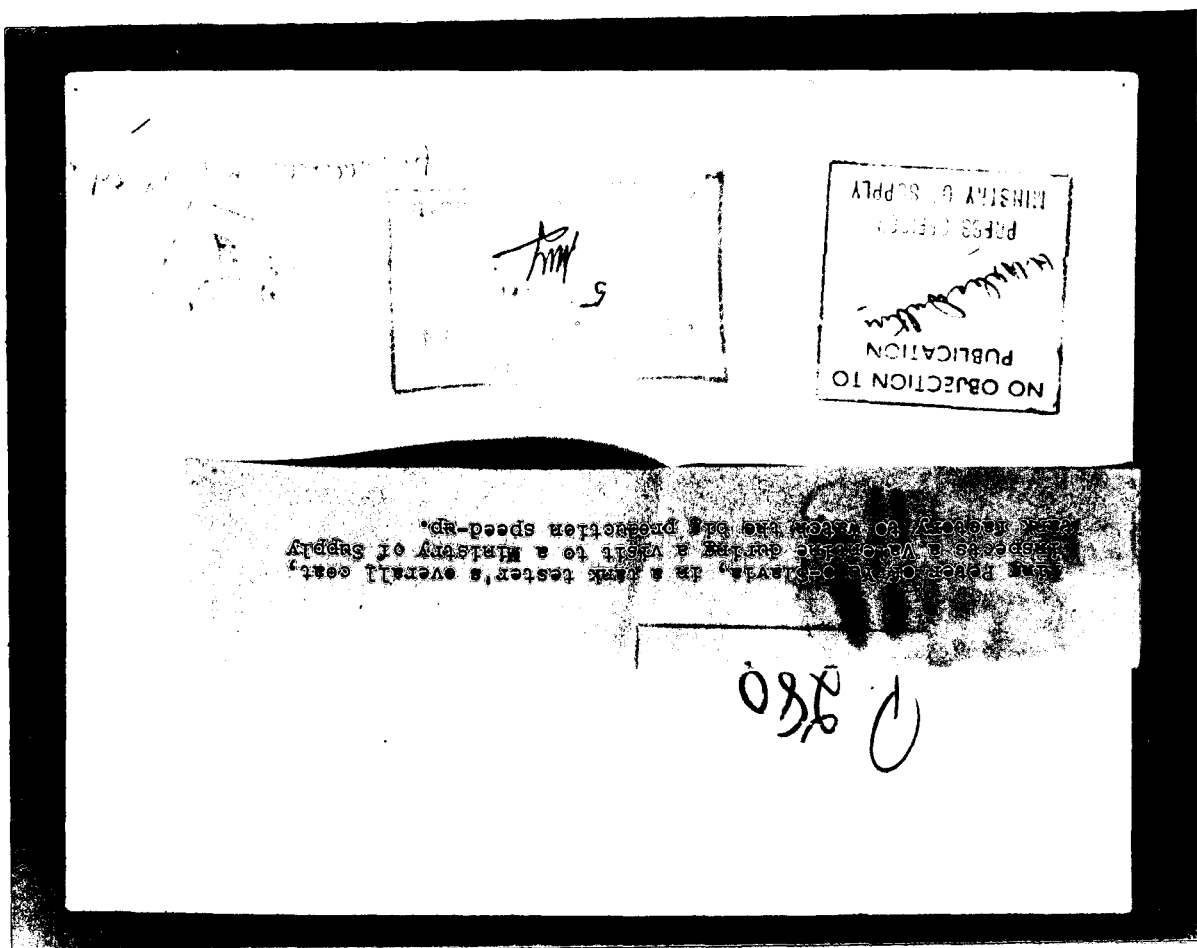
already approved by their official or military instigators would come in for immediate censorship routine and be passed out promptly. Agency and news items would often only require MoI approval, there being no other department or official body involved. However, whatever the sequence or logic of the events, there remained one paramount and virtually indisputable fact - any photograph intended for publication, however limited or public, had to be passed by the MoI before it was released for publication. It is that purely functional role with which the MoI Photographs Division was consistently involved that identified its true and basic rationale during the Second World War. Although much of the sponsoring and commissioning of photography was of course important, it was as a distribution and library centre that the Division performed its most fundamental and onerous duties.⁴

This reverse side of a photographic print displays the various procedures through which this photograph would have been passed before publication was approved. It would have been presented - complete with caption, as they were viewed as a single entity - to the censor at the MoI Photographs Division having been 'negatively' approved by the instigating organisation, in this case the Ministry of Supply. The 'no objection to publication' was the usual method by which this was approved by a ministry.

The 'passed for publication' stamp of the MoI censor dated 5th October 1941 is then followed by the red 'R' (for 'release') dated a day later, which indicates the day the photograph was actually issued for publication, as distinct from being passed for publication. At the time that the print was passed for publication by the censor, it would have been allocated the series number 'P' for Ministry of Supply origin, together with an individual negative and file number, in this case 280.

There were a range of prefixes for each filed category of print, 'A' for the Admiralty, 'B' for the Army, 'C' for the Royal Air Force, etc. The Home Front material was all collated under the 'D' prefix, and the system was simple and effective, although at times could be a little convoluted as for example, the prefix SFLM which related to 'Italian Newsreel Stills - Mainly Aircraft'.

There was no literal procedure to which each and every print was subject; sometimes the MoI would receive a print, and then forward it to the appropriate ministry or military authority before applying their own criteria for publication. In other cases, prints



where the print would be filed for reference. Those which were held or stopped were either sent to the Held Desk - where they would be filed until the date of release was reached, and then re-examined - or if stopped, filed permanently under the classification. In February, 1941, the staff available in the Photographic Division censorship room was nine clerks and typists to serve the needs of the numerous censors, whose numbers varied, but represented 'Air', 'Military', 'Naval', and 'Civil' interests.³

This procedure only relates to the photographic censorship within the MoI. All photographs would be subject to earlier or further scrutiny, dependent upon their origination, subject matter, or intended dissemination and application. There were field-censors, area censors, censors for theatres-of-war (as at Cairo for the Middle East), and each ministry or service unit might request and be entitled to the right of approval or denial of any photograph in which their interests might be represented. Despite the cumbersome nature of this process, photographs often were passed through the system amazingly quickly, although there were cases where prevarication over protocol or military expediency would compromise the news or propaganda value of an item. Some examples of this will be discussed later in this section. To review in detail the myriad reasons by which a photograph was held or stopped would be contentious and inconclusive. The material available remains immense and unresearched, and much of what we now recognise as censorship was often petty bureaucracy, or ineptness on the part of junior officials. By selecting a few examples, however, trends and attitudes may be discerned and appreciated which offer guidelines for further analysis.

photographs came to be censored or approved for publication. Any photograph intended for publication, whether from an official service unit, or civilian source had to be submitted in duplicate, together with its caption to the Press and Censorship Bureau Logging Desk of the Photographs Division. After being logged and enumerated, it would be passed to the photographic censor for stamping, dependent upon his or her decision. There were five categories:

Passed for Publication
Stopped
Passed with Hold for 10 days
Passed with Hold for 28 days
Held Indefinitely²

The hold categories were qualified. The 10-day hold was stipulated for events such as 'weather, etc', the 28-day hold for 'certain damage, etc', and the indefinite hold for 'colonial troops, etc'. It was common practice to hold any material in which adverse or severe weather conditions were evident, and the 28-day hold restriction had obvious relevance to bomb-damage or evidence of industrial disruption due to enemy action. The indefinite hold when related to colonial troops is as yet unexplained - discussions with the Photographic Library staff at the IWM indicate two possible reasons for this: firstly, that the ethnic appearance of coloured troops within British army formations gave the enemy an easily identifiable method of unit recognition in any specific area; and secondly, that intermittent friction over the disposition and use of Australian and New Zealand forces necessitated great care in their being publicly identified at certain periods in the war. Whatever interpretation may be placed upon this restriction, it was stated and recognised.

Any print received by the censor would be stamped with the relevant decision, and if passed, sent to the Classification Desk,

Chapter Six - Control and Censorship

Thus far, the study has been devoted to photographs originated in wartime, in which the circumstances surrounding any such origination has been of prime importance in their analysis.

Before finalising these images in retrospective terms - by perhaps defining what such images have come to represent - attention must be directed towards their contemporary use and application. The attitudes and assumptions that surround the use of photography in the Second World War remain diffuse, in part by the sheer complexity of the conflict and its coverage, but also due to the lack of an authoritative or official record of the activities of the MoI and its Photographs Division. Even a worthwhile recent book by Ian McLaine does not feature the word 'photography' in its index, and so the caucus of knowledge remains vague and insubstantive.¹

Nevertheless, identifiable and recognisable tensions existed between the origination and publication processes within British information and propaganda during the period under review, and the examples offered may illuminate this aspect a little more clearly.

Concomitant with this, considerations of photographic control and censorship may be re-examined - particularly with regard to editorial and press usage of visual material made available to them. It will also be appropriate to discuss examples of material which were denied to them, for a variety of reasons, and to place such censored material into a retrospective context when viewed alongside established and enduring images.

Before moving on to discuss the first illustration, it is necessary to thread through the rather intricate method by which

NOTES

Part 1

1. Gus Macdonald, Camera-Victorian Eyewitness (1979) p.106
2. Harold Evans, Pictures on a Page (1978) introduction
3. Ibid, p.5
4. Gail Buckland to author, 10th June, 1980
5. Ibid
6. Susan Sontag, On Photography (1978) p.5
7. Ibid, p.11
8. Ibid, p.106
9. See R. Barthes, Camera Lucida (1982) p.87
10. John Berger, 'Photography and Memory', New Society, 17th August, 1978, p.359
11. Ian Jeffrey to author, 26th February, 1980.
12. Arthur Marwick, The Home Front (1976) p.9
13. Paper by author, 'Documentary Photography in Britain 1939-1945, Implication or Evidence?', Symposium of the European Society for the History of Photography, Bath, April 1981
14. James Cameron to author, 14th October, 1980.

Part 2

15. Jane Carmichael to author, 18th March, 1982
16. Ian Grant, Cameramen at War (1980), p.37
17. Ibid, p.47
18. Cecil Beaton War Photographs 1939-1945 (1981), p.189
19. The War Illustrated, Vol.6, No.142, 27th November, 1942
20. Grant, op.cit, p.18
21. J. Lewinski, Camera at War (1978), p.109
22. See Michael Regan, When The Lights Go On Again, exhibition catalogue to Shelter Photographs touring exhibition, Manchester, 1978.
23. Cecil Beaton, op.cit, p.26
24. Ibid, p.29
25. Ibid, p.32
26. The War Illustrated, Vol.8, No.191, 13th October, 1944, p.338
27. See What a Picture (1981) and James Jarche, Press Picture Pioneer (1980), both monographs.

War Museum accredit this photograph as being taken from a British cruiser, possibly the Sheffield, which was shadowing the Bismarck throughout the action. The caption is ambiguous. The photograph actually shows the British battleship Rodney firing at the Bismarck. It is not the Bismarck being sunk. Notwithstanding this inaccuracy, details such as the low elevation of the guns indicate that it was firing towards the end of the action when the distance was closing, and the guns would be firing at a low trajectory.

The photograph suggests an amateur cameraman behind the viewfinder, probably a paymaster, or a member of the surgeons' staff who were the only crew members not actually required at action stations, and those members of a ship's company who often carried a camera with the Captain's permission and approval.

The picture, despite such corroborative information, remains ambiguous. Although anecdotal in character, and so, an 'unreliable' witness to war, it is no more so than other types of opinion and hearsay. Such images add depth and interest to a study of the events they claim to portray, and by their very existence, tantalise and intrigue the historian and photographic researcher alike.

Photographer unknown

The inclusion of this photograph was determined by the need to relate the involvement of the purely amateur photographer in the practice of wartime documentary photography. The snapshot - in the intimate family sense - remains outside the remit of this study, being within that private and personal use of the camera as a recreational instrument which is in itself worthy of much attention in a social and historical context. However, to define an image which was essentially documentary in nature, but which was originated by an amateur photographer posed obvious problems in terms of originality and variety.

This photograph is a good example of an image of very poor technical quality which in itself may be unreliable as a witness to a great event, but which due to known - or surmised - factors surrounding its origination, may assume a greater intrinsic value than at first reading might be obvious. The Admiralty frowned upon the idea of photographers being aboard their ships during the Second World War - a tradition still evident in the reluctance in the recent Falklands dispute for the Navy to have correspondents aboard the Task Force ships - and so, the war at sea remains the least-documented (in photographic terms) of the global conflict in British terms. The pursuit and eventual sinking of the German battleship Bismarck is ill-chronicled both in photography and film, most of the few extant photographs being taken by German crewmen on the Prinz Eugen, which accompanied the Bismarck.

The example given here is enigmatic in its style, yet appears to be authentic. Military and photographic archivists at the Imperial

P.265. (STOPPED)

A Colonel of the R.E's, just back from the front-line in Malta, has an unusual audience of building trade workers, also "front-line men". This picture was taken on a site where the Ministry of Supply is erecting new arms factories and houses for arms workers. Said the Colonel: "The quicker your army builds the factories the quicker my army will get the weapons, so that between us we can finish the job".

ROYAL
ARMY
CORPS
LONDON, E.C. 4



P 265



This particular photograph would have been stopped for a particular and perhaps obvious reason. Taken in the autumn of 1941 - at a period when the winning of the war was problematical to say the least - any photograph which did not display those virtues of pulling together in a cheerful spirit of national endurance on the Home Front would be likely to be censored. Taken on an MoI-commission at the Ministry of Supply's request by a Keystone Press cameraman, this photograph reveals a great deal, both in terms of content, and of style. It is one of a series of some 15 prints in the 'P' series album at the IWM archive, all taken on 5" x 4" negatives, and displaying many of the weaknesses of press-photography when applied to this situation. It appears to be a set-up situation - the crowd evident in this image has been moved about en masse across the building site, and placed for the photographer's benefit. Accordingly, many of the faces display boredom or mistrust, each shot being 'set-up' for a single exposure, before moving on to the next. It is no surprise to find that the majority of the 15 images in this set were stopped; perhaps what is more surprising is to find that the captions accompanying them had even been written, as the likelihood of such photographs being published must have been remote. The captions themselves are almost condescending or patronising, and in today's terms, have a class divisiveness about them.

Although stopped from publication in the war years, such a photograph tells us so much about wartime society, dress, habits, and attitudes. The almost universal flat-cap is very evident, the age of

the audience - many young and elderly - offers information about the social composition of the Home Front workforce, and the way in which the group have been manhandled about the site for a propaganda photograph appears all too recognisable in their general demeanour. The sterile style of the photography, and the lack of narrative content in the series illustrates the mundane level of many of these short-commissioned civilian press-cameramen in creative terms.

Such photographs, originated with propaganda intent in mind, fail in their contemporary application due to a lack of experience and understanding of the role of the camera in such circumstances. As the war progressed, clumsy and inexperienced efforts became rarer; yet to the end, there is often an almost amateur approach to the structuring and arranging of groups and formal gatherings. Whether this was a legacy of pre-war entrenched press attitudes, or whether those in authority at the MoI just did not appreciate the role of photography in wartime must remain an enigma. The evidence this image offers the viewer now is of a different society to that so popularly dispensed in the legends of the Home Front, and in that retrospective context, is an important and telling visual document.

Finally - the red hand is believed to indicate a 'stopped' and filed print, although this cannot be confirmed. It rarely appears on issued prints.



Plate 16

'Mme Nikolayeva gives the V-for-Victory
sign with factory workers'

Photographer unknown

It would be difficult to find a photograph which contrasted more with the previous example than this lively, informal, and utterly enjoyable picture. Yet it too was stopped from being published, but for very different reasons. The V-for-Victory sign had a 'legitimate' version - palms forward - and another version, with which we are all now familiar. How, when, or at what stage the 'alternative' version with its ribald currency became accepted as such is worthy of a study in itself, but this photograph, in which the two versions are displayed was probably stopped for that reason. This picture is from a series of some 6 photographs, all taken whilst this Russian visitor was being shown round a factory - it was released for publication as a set on 7th January, 1942 - but this individual photograph was stopped if issued on its own. An unusual practice, but if one views the set any doubts about the gestures are relieved when viewed within the context of the entire visit as displayed in the set of photographs.

In photographic terms, again it contrasts with the previous picture. Taken on a 35mm miniature camera - probably by an MoI photographer rather than a press-man - it utilises the spontaneity and candid quality of the small camera perfectly. Although 'set-up', it is in no way posed or forced, and the sheer enjoyment of the workers and the visitor shines through the picture. Certain other pictures of Russian dignitaries were covered by War Office photographers, some of whom were known to work with 35mm Leica cameras, so it is conceivable that this early visit was covered in this way.

As with many other pictures in the extensive 'P' series - some 2000 in all - it is also a source of social information for the modern researcher and historian. Again, dress and costume offer evidence for those interested in that area of social fashion, and although very much a clearly propaganda-initiated photograph, its social documentary value is intact.

A final dimension surrounding the context of this picture relates to the MoI attitude towards the Soviet Union after the German invasion of Russia in June, 1941. Surprised by the warmth of popular feeling towards Russia as an ally, the MoI responded by tackling this unexpected alliance with much fervour, not out of choice, but to avoid being overtaken by other popular movements. Essentialised in the massive Albert Hall rallies of the middle war years, and the 'Tanks for Russia' weeks of 1942, in which the solidarity of the British and Russian worker was emphasised, the MoI's participation in endorsing that emotive issue was often evidenced in this type of persuasive image.



Plate 17

'The Prime Minister visited the Soviet Embassy, where he and the Soviet Ambassador toasted the Soviet Union, the British Empire and Marshal Stalin in Russian champagne with the utmost cordiality'

Photographer, Major Horton

The end of the war saw no respite in censorship when the occasion demanded it. This strange photograph - made stranger by the inappropriate caption - dates from three days after the surrender of Germany. Stopped from being issued for publication, it shows a morose Churchill, and an uneasy Soviet official watched over with apparent apprehension by an ATS officer, believed to be Mary Churchill. It could not have been published - with or without the caption - for it in no way represents the triumph of the Allies in unity, nor does it even convey a sense of victory or celebration.

That being the case, there remain some intriguing aspects to our viewing of this image. With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps it more truly reflects the already uneasy relations between Russia and the Anglo-American allies than was prudent to discuss at the time. It also offers an alternative image of Churchill than the popular idea of the war-leader and pugnacious fighter against Fascism. Ironically, the suit worn by him in this photograph appears to be that shown in a well-known war picture of some five years earlier (of which more anon), so there is continuity of dress if nothing else.

Photographically, this is an almost bizarre image. Taken with a flash attachment, it has caught the performers in a frozen position - they are waxworks, without life or movement. Equally strange, there are no other prints or negatives of this event - taken certainly by a War Office photographer - so this remains the definitive documentary photograph of this minor event. The question to be considered is fundamental. Does this singular image really represent the reality of

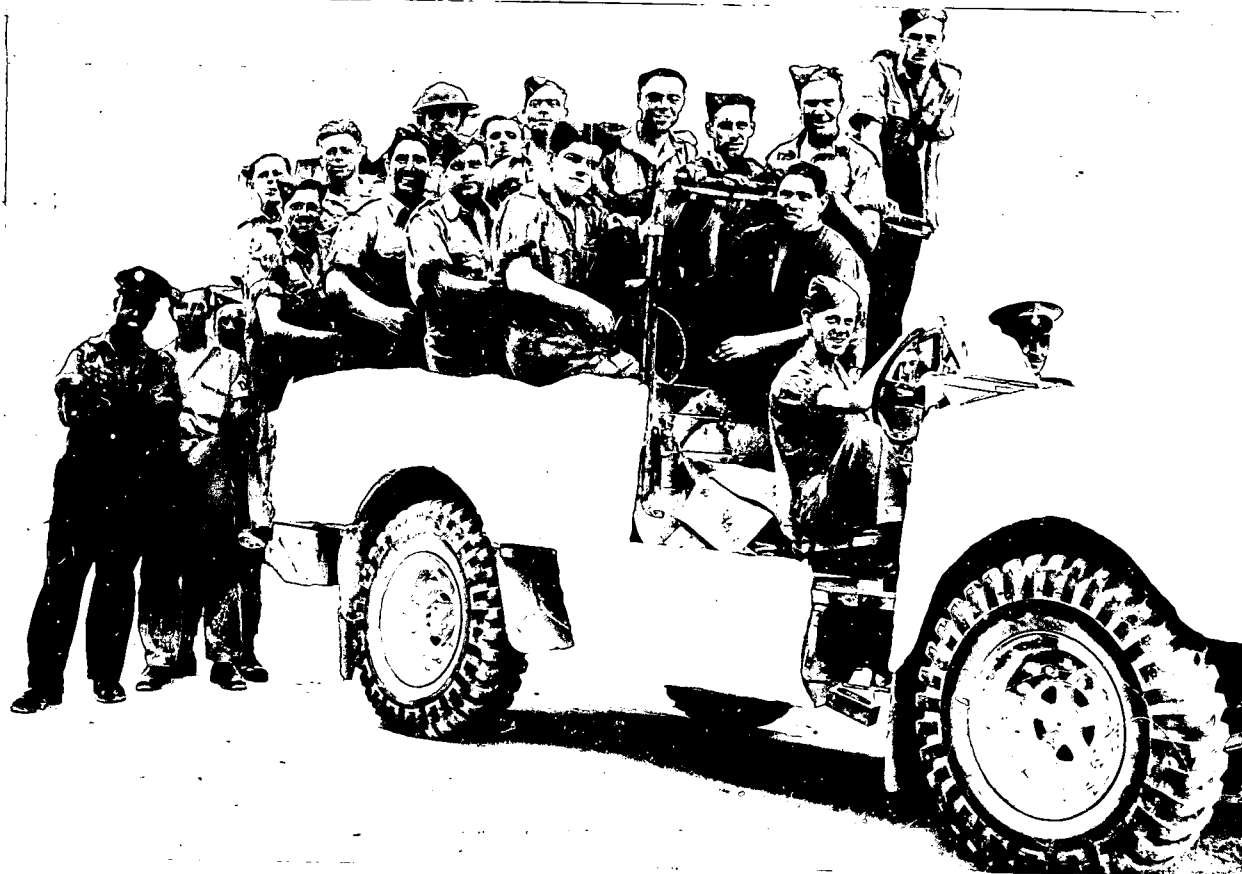
that meeting, or is it an inappropriate and selected moment from an otherwise cordial celebration? Only by studying the context in which the image was originated can we be assured of this. The photograph may or may not be a reliable witness to the event it claims to portray, and it is context alone that can provide such corroboration and confirmation.

Such concerns apart, it is a remarkable picture, offering the interpreter symbols and messages which with hindsight may seem revelatory, but which may merely be the photographer's presence creating an unreal and artificial atmosphere.

If there is a pantheon of war photography, pictures such as this are, as yet, not part of that hierarchy. It is now appropriate that they should become so, as their scarcity alone ensures their credibility, in which an alternative view of war, and those involved in its direction and conduct may be seen and re-assessed.



MALTA CONVOY GETS THROUGH
'A traffic sentry directing a lorry
on its arrival at one of the dumps'



Plates 18 and 19

Photographer, Lieut. H.E. Cook

This final example of censorship is purely within the field and military area, yet merits discussion. Much of the censorship of the Second World War was militarily-inspired, often for the best of reasons, but in retrospect, perhaps petty and irrational. However, war itself is not rational, so perhaps we should not be too surprised at this form of control being officially endorsed.

The island of Malta was under constant siege from 1940 to 1943, and these pictures, issued for publication, offer a direct manner in which retouching could overcome the censor's concerns. In the top picture can be seen a lorry painted in a disruptive camouflage scheme designed to blend the vehicle in with the stone-walled landscape in which it operated. This picture was stopped, but in the lower image can be seen a version which was allowed to be issued for publication, in which not only has the offending camouflage been opaqued-out, but the background also, leaving a picture which is almost meaningless in scope. How such a picture, even with the explanatory caption, could have been deemed of any illustrative value remains quite unbelievable in today's terms, yet it was issued in that form, although no evidence of it actually being printed can be traced.

Taken on the standard-issue Zeiss Super-Ikonta camera by an army photographer - not necessarily an AFPU cameraman - obviously the pictures are posed and arranged. Although in our terms, this level of retouching and censorship may appear extreme, this would perhaps not have been the view held in 1942. Malta at that time was an essential

strategic base, offering both naval and air-force units the locale to attack Axis shipping in the Mediterranean. Under strategic constraints of that magnitude, photography for propaganda usage was probably a very minor priority, both at field and theatre level, and to expect any information to be made available to the enemy under those circumstances would be quite unrealistic.

They remain curios in a sense - obvious examples of military field censors tampering with photographic negatives and prints to achieve a publishable result. They were not the first - nor are they the last - examples of images being restated to create or deny information to the enemy. They are rather unique, however, in one respect. When these prints were ordered from the IWM darkrooms, an attempt was made to remove the 40-year old opaque on the negative, but to no avail. So, the censors brush of 1942 still denies us the chance to see what really lies under the layer of photographic dye.

NOTES

1. Ian McLaine, Ministry of Morale (1979)
2. See INF.1/92 'Photographic Censorship Routine', Public Records Office
3. Ibid
4. See The War-time Trading Bulletin, Vol. 4, No.26. MoI Number, 1942, p.735

Chapter Seven - Application and Usage

The state of newspaper and magazine enterprises upon the outbreak of the Second World War in Britain has already been traced, and the way in which they responded to the contingencies of war in their use of photography forms the basis for this section of the study.

The newspapers and the press in general were part of a hierarchical information structure in which immediacy of information was the prime concern. Briefly, this was formed of:

- 1) Radio - dealing in the 'hottest news' and the basic facts of any event.
- 2) Newspapers - which elaborated on the basic facts, offered opinions, and perhaps added human detail.
- 3) Cinema newsreels - in which the public might 'see the event for themselves', often of course with sound and even in colour towards the end of the war.
- 4) Magazines - which could reinforce and deepen opinion, and/or strengthen interpretation of events. They would also illustrate in greater depth and quality than the daily press.
- 5) Books and Exhibitions - often retrospective in nature, yet re-affirming and supportive.

The different parts of this message-bearing and image-creating structure had varying amounts of resource invested in them, perhaps as a reflection of their viewed importance at the time. Radio had the highest priority in that respect, followed by the cinema and newsreels, whilst the printed page - whether newspaper or magazine - was placed fairly low down in the allocation of funds and resources. Nicholas Pronay proposes that there was a recognition by the

government and the authorities by the end of the 1930s that the press was a declining force for public persuasion.¹ The government distrusted the press record in the First World War, and there was evidence that the general public was also disenchanted with the press, excepting possibly the Daily Mirror which, by the 1930s, was a very successful paper with an increasing and devoted readership. The 1930s in photographic terms saw perhaps the worst excesses of 'greasy hat-band journalism', in which, regrettably, press photographers were involved.

The onset of war, and the ensuing implications for the mass media of the period became interwoven with concerns of national morale and political propaganda at national and international levels. In a pluralistic society under wartime control, to create an integrated information and propaganda process required a skilful and intelligent recognition of the time-differentiation involved in the use of the different media available. Photography was part of that process, and the following examples show how it came to be subsumed within the mass media contexts of the period.



Plate 20

LT. GEN. F. A. M. BROWNING
(GRENADIER GUARDS, AIRBORNE DIVISION),
HALF-LENGTH PORTRAIT, SIDE-FACED, WEARING CAP

Photographer unknown

Colour photography was sparsely employed by the British during the Second World War, not only because there was no indigenous British process - the Kodachrome and Agfacolor processes being American and German respectively - but because the reprographic means by which it might be published were few and far between, and the costs considerable. Despite these constraints, British official photographs were commissioned regularly by both MoI and service units, and a few privileged civilian photographers - James Jarcho and the Saidman brothers in particular - were able to use the scarce supplies from America.

Kodak at Harrow were able to process the Kodachrome transparency film and, provided the material could be obtained from Eastman-Kodak in the U.S.A., pictures could be taken, even if only a few might be published.

The example shown here is an early Kodachrome transparency - the original, a 9 x 12 cms positive, is in the IWM archives - and shows General Browning attending military exercises in the autumn of 1942. There are some 3,500 listed subjects in the colour series, and when viewed in the sequence of earlier and later pictures, it appears to have been taken in either September or October of that year. It is a fine, conventional portrait, probably taken by one of the AFPU cameramen, who certainly were issued with the colour film throughout the war. It could have been taken by an accredited War Office photographer, although this is unlikely in the circumstances, as the shooting record

sheets on file at the IWM are usually filled in by AFPU or RAF Photographic Unit operatives.

Kodachrome at this period was available in a wide range of film sizes, but the most commonly-used professional size was the 9 x 12 cms stock, which was handy to load and process, yet offered good reprographic quality for printing. The permanence of the emulsion is remarkable. Although some forty years old, it shows little sign of colour fading, and although 'slow' in today's film-speed terms, obviously allowed the photographer adequate latitude to create portraits of this calibre and quality.

It is of interest to note that Kodak had to accept the presence of MoI censors at their Harrow processing plant, as the colour transparency formed the finished result, and from a censorship viewpoint, was the 'print'.² It is interesting to speculate on what may, or may not have happened to colour transparencies which were felt to be unsuitable for publication under those conditions of field censorship. Discussion with the Curator of the Kodak Museum, Brian Coe, revealed little information in that context, although Kodak were allowed to make formal colour portraits of military figures in their studio throughout the war, often on the large-format 10" x 8" colour transparency Kodachrome material.



Plate 21

'ILLUSTRATED' MAGAZINE, 31st OCTOBER, 1942

The connection between the previous plate and this one is obvious, at least in purely photographic terms. Less so, however, when viewed in the context of origination and application. This plate shows the front-cover of the issue of Illustrated magazine in which colour photography was first used, and this was taken from a page in the press-cuttings book kept by a unit in the MoI Photographs Division to monitor and record the use of MoI issued material.

How this particular picture came to be used by Odhams in their magazine is probably a reflection of the good relationship that existed between the MoI and that particular periodical, and its owners. From the earliest days of the war, the MoI saw Illustrated as a possible propaganda vehicle, free from the (to them) left-wing aspirations of Picture Post, yet with a large readership used to looking at photographs as illustrations. Several special issues of Illustrated were produced with MoI cooperation, including an issue on the Royal Air Force.³ It is not surprising, therefore, to find that when this magazine did eventually produce a colour-cover, that it would be of a military subject taken by an official war cameraman under the auspices of the MoI. It is only fair to point out that it was certainly not specifically taken for the cover, or indeed for that publication. The original picture seen earlier is framed horizontally by the photographer, whilst it is used in a vertical mode by the magazine. So, we can be fairly sure that it was not commissioned directly for the magazine's usage, yet the closeness of its origination date to the magazine's publication date is noticeable.

Throughout the war, this initial use of colour was maintained, and the inter-relationship between the MoI and Illustrated was

inescapable. Later editions featured virtually unedited sets of MoI Feature Unit stories, some in colour and black-and-white, which clearly indicated the magazine's willingness to take MoI-issued material verbatim.⁴ Illustrated has never matched the reputation enjoyed by Picture Post as a social journal, yet its photography, layout, and general 'readability' ensured a readership in the millions which continually posed Picture Post a circulation problem. Now the magazine can be reappraised and, bearing in mind the propaganda contexts already referred to, it still offers a clear and - to a degree - populist view of the war that may well have been as representative as that so often proclaimed by Picture Post. What is not in doubt is that photography was the primary vehicle by which this was achieved.



Plate 22

ARRIVAL BACK FROM DIEPPE
'Some of the men after arrival at Newhaven,
one is wearing a bandage on his head'

Photographer, Lieut. H. Spender

If Illustrated enjoyed a fruitful and productive relationship with the MoI, Picture Post did not. The pre-war stance of this periodical, in which photographs and text were combined with a critical and socially-concerned editorial platform was not compromised by the onset of war. Friction between the Photographs Division of the MoI and the editorial team of the magazine developed early on in the conflict over the availability of photographs of the war in France in 1940, and by 1942, when this photograph was taken, the situation had not improved.⁵ This image is offered as an example of how Picture Post was able to maintain its critical stance using officially-issued pictures, to the extent that it was converting such photographs into critical visual comments on recent military events - in this case, the Dieppe Raid of August, 1942.

Humphrey Spender, by now a junior officer in the War Office commissioned as an official photographer, took this photograph at Newhaven of the troops disembarking after the Raid. It is not surprising to find he was appalled by what he saw:

I actually fainted on taking the return of the Dieppe Raid because there was so much blood around...⁶

Spender was accompanied on this occasion - as on many others during his War Office commission - by an information officer from the War Office, who might either confiscate Spender's film on the spot if he felt photographs were being taken which might exceed considerations of military necessity, or who would actually prohibit the exposing of film if Spender turned his camera in the wrong direction. This level

of intimidation exhausted Spender in his War Office work, resulting in what he deems to be some of his most unrewarding photography. No longer able to pursue his detached observational role of his Mass Observation work of the late 1930s, in these conditions he virtually did as he was told.

Accordingly, his set of pictures from which this example is taken, are undemanding both in terms of technique and content. Shot on the standard rollfilm Super-Ikonta - a camera that Spender disliked due to its slowness of operation and limited exposure capacity in comparison with the 35mm Leicas and Contaxes he used in civilian life - they are records of the event, albeit highly competent ones. He is obviously 'observed' by his subjects - no chance of the candid shot under those conditions - but the key to this picture is the wounded soldier strangely specifically referred to in the caption in such a direct manner. Spender reminisced that this soldier was so exhausted he could barely stand, and was quite unaware of what seemed to be going on around him - it was that dimension that Spender recognised and recorded.⁷



Plate 23

Ministry of Information Photographs Division (Periodicals Unit)

Guard Book, August-September 1942, Album

As with all MoI originated and disseminated photography, Spender's picture was monitored and filed in the above press-cuttings book. Not, of course, just as a bromide print, but in the applied manner in which it became published.

Picture Post at this period in the war remained an abrasive publication, certainly to official circles. Under the editorship of Tom Hopkinson, it cajoled, commented, and roundly criticised official and governmental bodies for their performances, or more often, for lack of them. The Dieppe Raid was not exempt from this type of editorial comment, and the front-cover shown here introduced an article in that same issue in which the Raid was examined:

The Dieppe Raid - biggest landing in Europe by the forces of freedom since France fell - raises many questions. Some for the military authorities, some for us all. In these pages we give some of the answers - and trace in pictures the course of the action.⁸

With the inevitable benefit of hindsight, recent writers have claimed the relative failure of the raid was suppressed at the time - and in view of the Canadian casualties incurred, this was not so surprising.⁹ Nevertheless, the Picture Post account of the event, restricted by the limited photographs issued by the MoI at the time, gives evidence that concern was being expressed in contemporary terms. Spender's cover picture, and above all, the skilful manner in which Hopkinson cropped and edited the photograph to imply a very different meaning from that officially intended, was part of that contemporary comment.

The relative military merits of this event are outside the scope or competence of this study. What remains of paramount interest is the way in which a documentary photographer came to record the event in an official capacity with the likelihood that Tom Hopkinson was unaware of who had taken the picture he chose to edit so dramatically. For two pre-war documentary figures to become so entangled in a wartime context poses questions not only of continuity, but of compromise. At one level, it could be claimed that Spender and Hopkinson were able to maintain their critical stance towards society, however unwittingly in logistical terms - one the concerned photographer, the other the zealous editor. Alternatively, was Spender no longer little more than a War Office cameraman, doing as he was told, and was Hopkinson smarting under MoI constraints, and being critical as a matter of course, rather than in a discerning and constructive manner?

The reality may well be that both parties were doing their professional work to the best of their ability under difficult and demanding wartime restrictions. The fact that Spender's images exist from the war at all is a bonus to modern students of photography, and Picture Post's contribution to British journalism is accepted and assured. In retrospect, both Spender and Hopkinson deserve much credit for their work, however compromised it may seem with the accumulated knowledge of the past forty years.



Plate 24

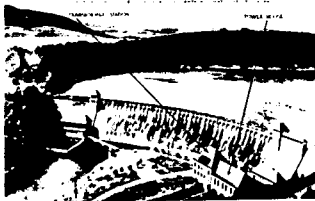
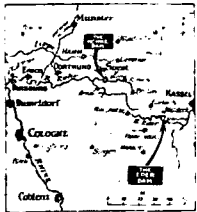
THE MOHNE DAM. A COPY OF THE ORIGINAL
PRINT WHICH BORE THE SIGNATURES OF THE
SURVIVORS OF THE OPERATION

The bombing of the Mohne, Eder, and Sorpe Dams in Northern Germany on the night of the 16th and 17th of May, 1943, provides an example of how the role of the camera could become enmeshed, and eventually subsumed into a far greater promotional dimension than originally envisaged or intended.

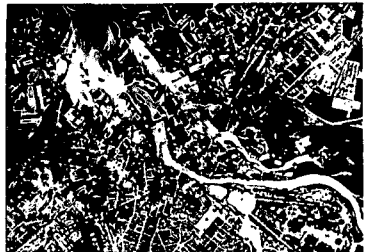
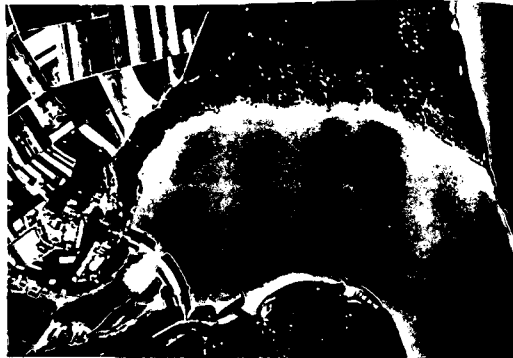
This photograph, probably taken on the standard RAF F.24 or F.52 aerial reconnaissance cameras, which were fitted into Spitfires and Mosquito aircraft of the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) based at Benson and elsewhere, is a typical piece of photographic intelligence. Such prints were produced after every RAF Bomber Command action, not only for the obvious and immediate task of providing assessment of the damage incurred by the night bombing offensive, but in a secondary capacity, to act as a form of visual assurance to aircrews that the sacrifices made nightly in men and machines were to some effect. This was achieved by the levels at which such images were viewed and interpreted. Initially, negatives were scanned for vital information at the PRU base, known as Phase 1 interpretation. Following this, prints were made - stereo pairs for greater detail - and interpreted at the RAF's Photographic Intelligence Unit at Medmenham, in the Thames Valley. This was referred to as Second Stage Interpretation (for information of immediate value such as bomb-damage assessment), and Third Stage if it related to information of a longer-term value, for example, new factory construction or new aircraft types seen at airfields. This information was sent to the Air Ministry, Director of Photographic Intelligence (ADIPH) for approval in terms of issue or being withheld.

A TITANIC
BLOW AT
GERMANY
VIA SMASH
FLOODS
MIGHTY
DAMS

B



THE COMING OF THE FLOODS: R.A.F. CAMERAS RECORD
THE DAM-BREAKERS' HARVEST OF DESTRUCTION.



These two copy photographs are taken from issues of the Illustrated London News. Plate 25 is dated 22nd May, 1943; Plate 26, a week later, 29th May, 1943. Both utilise the RAF photographic reconnaissance material, but now firmly placed in the public domain with promotional and propaganda overtones. The method by which such images came to be made public has already been traced in outline, yet the purely propaganda aspects of the event were created, or evolved, after the mere issuing of a set of photographs. Recent writers have been critical of the Dams Raid:

The results of the raid, the official historian wrote in 1961, were 'disappointing'. But the myth, born in the rapturous press reporting of the raid, triumphed over reality.¹²

The examples shown, accompanied by copy such as 'A Titanic Blow at Germany', and 'RAF Cameras Record The Dam-Breakers Harvest of Destruction' represent this form of press-application referred to, and indeed, have gone a long way towards the creation of a war legend or myth. This has been endorsed in post-war terms in the publication of the book The Dam Busters, and the production of a feature-film of the same name.¹³

There are few examples as accessible as this event in which the original role of the photograph has become subsumed into the propaganda context to the extent that its original remit has now become obscured. The human dimensions of the event - Wing-Commander Guy Gibson being awarded the Victoria Cross - are as much part of the legend as Barnes Wallis's 'bouncing bomb' and the Lancaster bomber aircraft which carried it. The raid had great theatrical potential,

quite understandably capitalised upon in contemporary terms, yet such a propaganda application was perhaps, in a wartime context, inevitable.

As James Cameron remarked, however:

Perhaps it is as unfair to blame photography for propaganda as it is to blame the alphabet for lies in print.¹⁴

Perhaps in wartime, there is no such thing as an objective photograph. Once the RAF-initiated reconnaissance photograph became public property, its original intrinsic value became transmuted into a symbol, a talisman even, in which national identity and pride might be reflected. As historical evidence, such images are to a certain extent beyond redemption, their symbolic value even exceeding our present-day analysis and interpretation.

NOTES

1. Nicholas Pronay to author, 12th Devenber, 1980
2. See INF.1/351 'Responsibility of Developing and Printing Firms in Respect of Photographs of Prohibited Subjects', Public Records Office
3. See INF.1/237 'Sponsoring Publication - Special 'Illustrated' Number on RAF', Public Records Office
4. See, for example 'Harry Hargreaves Gets a Medal', Illustrated, 7th August, 1943
5. See INF.1/234A 'Publicity by means of a Pictorial Publication, Picture Post' Public Records Office
6. Humphrey Spender to author, 11th July, 1980
7. Ibid
8. Picture Post, 5th September, 1942
9. See Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty (1975), pp.317-320
10. Constance Babington-Smith to author, 16th November, 1979
11. See Evidence in Camera, Vol.8, No.11, 1st January, 1945, Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon
12. Paul Brickhill, The Dam Busters (1951)
14. James Cameron to author, 14th October, 1980

Chapter Eight - Retained Images

Roland Barthes has written:

The Photograph does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph). The effect it produces on me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance), but to attest that what I see has indeed existed.¹

The photographs presented in this thesis reflect this attitude, and are available to historians as sources of visual evidence. Considerations of style, content, and context merit attention, particularly in terms of contemporary editorial applications in which wartime propaganda constraints may have been evident.

There remain, however, those photographs which, contrary to Barthes' opinion, enjoy a different status, and have the capacity to conjure up essential historical moments, events, and personalities. Such images are more than contemporary records or illustrations; they possess recreative and representational qualities which offer a graphic and accessible view of history as seen through the lens of the camera.

The final set of photographs are of this genre; perhaps they recreate the past in its own terms too forcefully for objective analysis, and are, in essence, a form of visual shorthand. Without exception, they are actuality photographs, possibly arranged, but never faked or artificially contrived. Their originations are diverse; they exhibit variety in content; yet the style of photography offered is comprehensively documentary in character.

All enjoyed a contemporary validity which they still carry to this day. For historians, they may appear ambiguous, inextricably intermixed with dimensions of 'truth' and 'myth' which deny rational analysis. Such tensions may also refute considerations of a purely

aesthetic nature, their creative content irrelevant, or even instituted in their own time-scale to a degree that resists retrospective evaluation. Despite such concerns, these images remain secure, their appeal and potency still effective some forty years since their origination.

They are best left to speak for themselves. They do not seem to benefit from explanations or captions other than those with which they were originally issued. As it has been the study of photography which initiated and motivated this thesis, it is fitting that enduring photographic images of this integrity should form its conclusion.

KY.9042 ALBUM 108 BRITAIN'S HOME FRONT 1939-1945
THE CIVILIAN EVACUATION SCHEME (AGENCY PHOTOGRAPHS) 622

Photographer unknown, 4th July, 1940



Plate 27

'A policewoman with some of the
kiddies at a London station'

H.2646 WAR OFFICE OFFICIAL, UNITED KINGDOM

Photographer, Capt. Horton, 31st July, 1940



Plate 28

WINSTON CHURCHILL WITH TOMMY GUN
'The Prime Minister with a 'Tommy Gun' which was used
in an exercise which he watched when he toured the
North Eastern Coast Fortifications and Defences'

CH.1681 AIR MINISTRY OFFICIAL, RAF UNITED KINGDOM

Photographer unknown, 28th December, 1940



48

Plate 29

STANFORD TUCK AT MARTLESHAM HEATH

POPPERFOTO

Photographer, H.A. Mason, 29th December, 1940



Plate 30

WAR'S GREATEST PICTURE

'St Paul's stands unharmed in
the midst of the burning city'

GM.3769 WAR OFFICE OFFICIAL, GIBRALTAR AND MALTA

Photographer, Sgt. Agius, AFPU, 7th September, 1943



Plate 31

GEORGE FORMBY ENTERTAINS TROOPS AT MALTA
'A close-up of George Formby
during an impromptu performance'

BU.3765 WAR OFFICE OFFICIAL NW EUROPE

Photographer unknown, 15th April, 1945

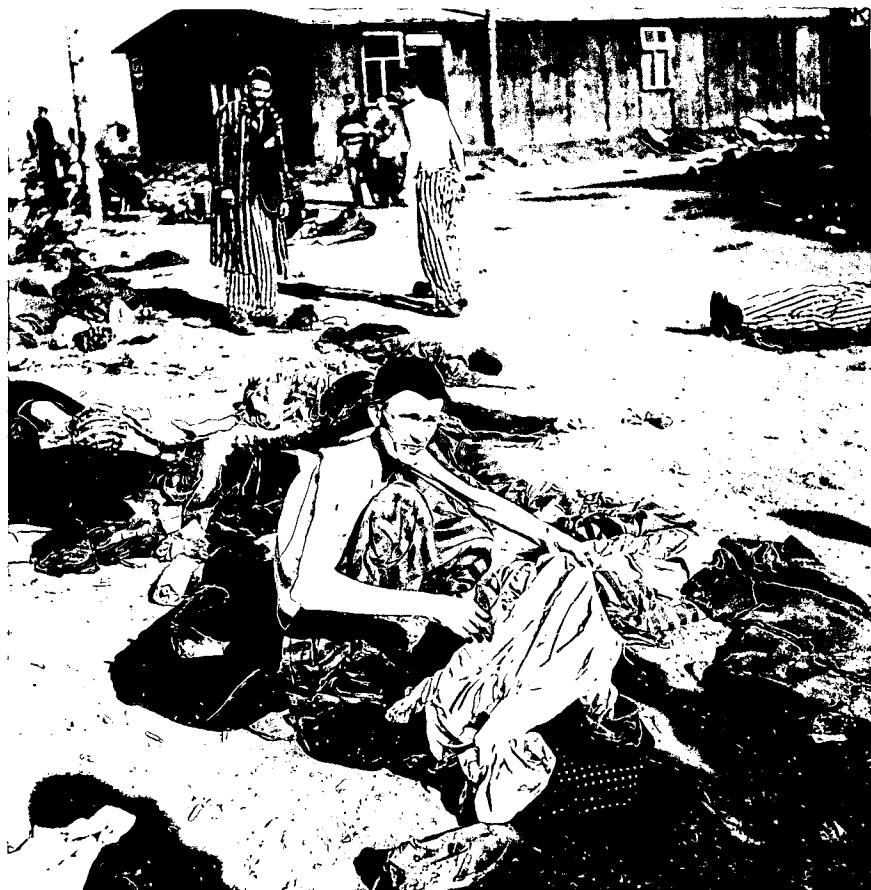


Plate 32

BELSEN HORROR CAMP

'A living skeleton seen delousing his clothes'

BU.5208 WAR OFFICE OFFICIAL, NW EUROPE

Photographer, Capt. Malindine, AFPU, 4th May, 1945



Plate 33

'L to R around the table, Major Friedal,
Konter-Admiral Wagner, Admiral von Friedeburg,
Field-Marshal Montgomery, General of Infantry Kinzel,
and Colonel Poleck listen to F.M. Montgomery
read the surrender terms'

MH.2629 OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS - ACCESSIONS

U.S.A.A.F originated print, date unknown



Plate 34

'Original photograph from the United States gives the clearest evidence to date of the destructive power of the Atom bomb. The smoke billowing 20,000 feet above Nagasaki after the atomic raid. Driven with volcanic force in a straight line, the smoke did not even begin to billow out until it passed through the cloud layers'

NOTE

1. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (1982), p.82

A Necessary Postscript

In conclusion, or at least, in summation, some recent events merit brief reference. Whilst the text for this thesis was being finalised, the Falkland Islands conflict occurred, and at the time of writing, is still unresolved, militarily or politically. Since the time, some seven weeks ago, when the Task Force sailed for the South Atlantic, this thesis has been haunted by what amounts to a sense of deja vu. Some forty years on from the period in which this study has been conducted, the same lessons appear to have to be re-learned by another generation over the production and dissemination of war news, information, and above all, pictures. Again, there is delay in the issuing of photographs; again, anything likely to be of military value to the enemy, such as the taking of South Georgia, qualifies for two weeks of silence; and again, the press agitates for more news from home, having at times to rely on 'enemy' information, however false or biased.

Perhaps our collective belief that like Vietnam, this might be a 'media war' denied our national identity and history. The Admiralty again was reluctant to take correspondents on board - government intervention had to ensure that - and again, pictures of combat at sea remain virtually non-existent. So, in a form of action-replay, this particular war will once again assume its own myths in the absence of reality: the popular tabloid press, with its chalked messages on Sidewinder missiles, replaying the RAF's scrawled insults to Hitler forty years ago; and the fighting men once again eulogised in heroic terms - the Paras, the Marines, and the so-English names like Squadron-Leader Bertie Penfold and Admiral Sandy Woodward. The

Sheffield and Coventry are already part of naval history, and like the V1, the Exocet assumes a robot-like invincibility.

For the writer of this thesis, it is disturbing to see such imbalances recreated, and to perceive that the role of the photograph and the photographer remains so constrained in time of war. One would have hoped that the world of mass-media had moved on, and that public access would be heightened, and public awareness more developed. At this time, this does not appear to be the case. Admittedly, the war is far from over, the history far from complete, yet thus far, the indications are, that like the global conflict of 1939-1945, the South Atlantic conflict of 1982 suffers similar constraints of a national nature, in which photography has become an early casualty. Let us hope that time will prove otherwise, but the similarity makes a fitting end to what has been an engaging, absorbing, and rewarding study of photography and its historical context in time of war and human conflict.

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