Tasmanian Devil:
The Fast and Furious Life of Errol Flynn

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BILLING / TWO LINE SYNOPSIS

Tasmanian Devil: The Fast and Furious Life of Errol Flynn

Errol Flynn remains one of the most fascinating characters ever to work in Hollywood. Remembered as much for his scandals as his acting, there was another side to Errol: writer, war reporter and even devoted family man.

THREE PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS

Tasmanian Devil: The Fast and Furious Life of Errol Flynn

Fifty years after his death, people are still fascinated by Errol Flynn. The romantic star of dozens of Hollywood movies, Flynn’s real life was in fact far more adventurous than any of his films.

In a life dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure, Flynn became notorious for his love affairs, scandals and rebellious nature. But there was another, much less well known side to his character. He was a fine writer, both of novels and journalism, wrote well reviewed novels and reported from wars and revolutions. Among his scoops was the first interview with the newly victorious Fidel Castro who Flynn tracked down in his mountain hideaway in Cuba.

In Tasmanian Devil we discover the unknown Flynn, from his troubled childhood in Tasmania to his death, just fifty years later, in the arms of his teenage lover. We hear from his surviving children, friends and colleagues and discover an amazing life of almost unbelievable events. His was a life well lived.
EXTENDED SYNOPSIS

Tasmanian Devil: The Fast and Furious Life of Errol Flynn

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The son of a respected Professor of Biology, Errol was born in the most isolated of Australia’s cities, Hobart, on the island state of Tasmania. There are still a few there who remember him. Isla Andrews, 95 years old and going strong, remembers her school days with Errol and how, even as a youngster, he was constantly in trouble at school. Charming and handsome, Errol could get away with schoolboy pranks, but eventually people tired of his misbehaviour and he would be expelled from every school he ever attended.

Isla also recalls that Errol, while adoring his father, had a difficult relationship with his mother who he was said to hate. Errol’s eldest daughter, Dierdre Flynn agrees and believes it explains his often difficult relationships with women in the years to come.

With his formal education over, Errol found he had no more patience for conventional employment than he had for formal education, so at 18 he set out to make his fortune in the wild jungles of New Guinea. He enjoyed little success there and as Flynn biographer, Jeffrey Meyers, put it, soon accumulated a broad knowledge of the darker side of human nature. He became involved in gun running, black slaving and failed attempts to grow tobacco.

It was in New Guinea that Flynn met the mysterious Austrian, Dr Hermann Erben, with whom he would form a close and dangerous friendship that in the years to come would cost Errol dearly.

Professor Lincoln Hurst has studied Flynn’s life in much detail and reveals a key excerpt from Flynn’s unpublished diaries which show that even as a young man, the future Hollywood star dedicated himself to living life to the limit, to discover all its pleasures, “so that when I come to die, I cannot say that I have not lived.”

It was a philosophy he would maintain for all of his short life. After a brief and not terribly successful debut in one of Australia’s first sound pictures, Errol was forced to flee Sydney after stealing the diamonds of a rich society wife he had bedded. Never to return to Australia, he set off with vague plans to become an actor as it seemed the only job he was suited to.
One aspect of Errol’s life we soon discover is his incredible luck. Born very good looking, and inheriting his father’s easy-going charm, he was able to breeze through the first decades of his life seemingly without effort. And his luck certainly held up when on a steamer bound for America with dreams of stardom, he was noticed by a beautiful and well-established French movie actress, Lili Damita. Soon they were lovers, then husband and wife. The stunning couple made an immediate impact when they arrived in Hollywood in the early 1930s.

Lilli introduced him to her émigré friends who held important positions in the Hollywood studios - and after that, his charm and good looks would do the rest. Amazingly, Jack Warner took a punt on two complete unknowns to star in ‘Captain Blood’ the biggest film of 1935. Olivia De Havilland and Errol Flynn were overnight successes.

Errol quickly became the highest earning star in Hollywood. But wealth and fame were of themselves of little interest to him beyond providing easy access to the two passions of his life: beautiful women and magnificent yachts.

His twin desires would intersect disastrously when a teenage actress claimed she was raped by Flynn aboard his yacht, the Zaca. Another young girl would also accuse him of rape and the subsequent trial was so closely followed it even pushed news of World War 11 off the front pages of American newspapers. Though he was eventually (and controversially) cleared of the charges, the infamous rape trial marked the end of Errol’s seemingly unstoppable rise to stardom.

When illness later kept him out of active service in the military, his days as a hero were over. Errol lost interest in Hollywood and the feeling was mutual.

Flynn moved to Europe and lived, for the most part, aboard the Zaca. It allowed him to at least continue his wish to be taken seriously as a writer.

Writing was an enduring passion that stayed with him all his life. As a young man and at the peak of his Hollywood stardom, Errol had shown that he was very serious about his ambitions as a writer. When the Spanish War started, he decided to go, the only Hollywood actor to do so, his intention being to report as objectively as he could on what was fast becoming one of Europe’s most important conflicts.

Unwisely, although he didn’t know it at the time, he took Herman Erben with him as photographer, the man whose Nazi connections were to compromise Flynn’s reputation for the rest of his life. There is absolutely no evidence at all that Flynn knew about Erben’s other life. As the esteemed Hollywood director Vincent Sherman says, Flynn was not racist or harboured prejudices of any kind … he just didn’t care what you were.

Flynn never took Hollywood seriously, at least not as seriously as it took itself, and eventually Hollywood broke off the relationship. His rebelliousness and lack of concern for what people thought had taken him into too many places that were too hard to cover up.

To all intents his career was over and he had become what he always despised – a washed-up actor begging for work.

But as was always the case with Flynn, just as everything was looking hopeless for him, he found a way to bounce back. It was his old friend and foe Jack Warner who threw the lifeline and Flynn was back in the studio.
His final works were to be some of his finest – Too Much Too Soon and The Sun Also Rises were critically acclaimed and Flynn was well on the way to being recognised as the serious actor he had always wanted to be. He was nominated for an academy award but ironically the nomination was mysteriously, and without explanation, withdrawn. It was a cruel world for Flynn, but he was a survivor and there was more to come.

On the Warner’s lot, Flynn had noticed a young actress, Beverly Aadland. He took her to dinner (she asked her mother’s permission) and this was the beginning of a relationship that became the last and possibly the happiest of his life.

Cuba and the Caribbean had always held a strong attraction for Flynn, and when the Revolution began in Cuba he managed to get a commission from the Hearst press to go there to cover it. In fact Flynn the journalist scooped the rest of the world by tracking Fidel Castro down in his mountain headquarters to interview him in the days before the final collapse of the Batista regime. Jeffrey Meyers claims that Flynn not only got on well with Fidel but that he was coaching him in the art of speech-making.

It’s during this fascinating time in Flynn’s life that he made the hilarious feature Cuban Rebel Girls with Beverly, and then more importantly, a curious mix of the absurd and serious, Cuban Story a documentary made with producer Victor Pahlen. While Flynn tops-and-tails this documentary in what is almost a parody of himself, the actual footage which documents the Revolution is an extraordinary and often harrowing record of the time.

By this time Flynn had clearly nailed his colours to the mast. He was a supporter of the revolutionaries and declared ‘…all you young men and women fighting for political freedom and your own beliefs everywhere… I wish you good luck.

This indeed was a mark of the man.

There is humour, great fun and not a little sadness in Flynn’s story, but as his daughter Deirdre puts it so well ‘He was one of a kind, and I think it will be a long time before you see anything similar to him – if ever’.
CAST LIST AND BIOGS

Christopher Lee narrator, (available for interview)

Christopher Lee is probably best known to contemporary cinema audiences for his menacing performance as Saruman in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, or as Count Dooku in Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones. But Christopher Lee has had more than 250 screen credits since the early 1950s (including of course the Dracula films for Hammer) and, while he hardly enjoys a swashbuckling image, he’s appeared in more on-screen sword fights than any other actor. Lee worked with Flynn in the 1955 film The Warriors (UK title The Dark Avenger) – the site of their notorious sword fight in which Lee almost lost a finger — and then in a number of episodes of The Errol Flynn Theatre made for television at Bray studios during 1956 and 1957. Christopher Lee is also the narrator for Tasmanian Devil.

Lincoln D. Hurst (available for interview)

Lincoln D. Hurst is Emeritus Professor at the University of California, Davis, where he taught for twenty-three years. He holds a doctorate from Oxford University and has appeared in nearly twenty documentaries on various aspects of the history of Warner Brothers and classic Hollywood. He is also the author of a forthcoming book on Errol Flynn’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War in 1937. He resides in Woodland, California.

Jeffrey Meyers

Jeffrey Meyers, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, is the author of Inherited Risk: Errol and Sean Flynn in Hollywood and Vietnam (2002). He’s lectured around the world, frequently appeared on television and recently received an Award in Literature “to honor exceptional achievement” from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His 45 books on film, literature and art have been translated into twelve languages, and include biographies of Humphrey Bogart and Gary Cooper.

Peter Valenti (available for interview)

Peter Valenti has written extensively on Warner Bros. films, particularly those of Errol Flynn and John Garfield, and his Errol Flynn: A Bio-Bibliography (Greenwood Press) has remained in print since its initial publication in 1984. Peter is finishing his current book project, How Angels Speak: The Problem of Film Blanc, and is Professor of English and Director of the Teaching and Learning Center at Fayetteville State University.

John Hammond Moore

John Hammond Moore is the author of The Young Errol: Flynn before Hollywood, the definitive work on Errol’s early life in Australia and New Guinea. John was working in Sydney’s Macquarie University in the early 1970s when he made a research trip to New Guinea. He started to hear wild tales about Flynn’s exploits in New Guinea and was so fascinated that he started to conduct more systematic interviews, and the result was Young Errol, published in 1975.

Vincent Sherman (1906-2006)

The late Vincent Sherman was a Hollywood writer and director who worked with many of the Golden Legends of Hollywood – including Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Rita Hayworth, Joan Crawford, Paul Newman, and Richard Burton. Vincent directed Errol Flynn in one of his best swashbuckling films, Adventures of Don Juan in 1949, and was personally responsible for injecting humour and self-parody into the film. It is one of Flynn’s best performances in his later years. Vincent remained active in Hollywood well into his nineties, but passed away some months after being interviewed for Tasmanian Devil.
Deirdre Flynn
Deirdre and her sister Rory are Errol Flynn's daughters from his second marriage to Nora Eddington. Deirdre currently lives in Los Angeles. Among other things in the industry, Deirdre has worked as a stunt driver in Hollywood – Steve McQueen taught her to drive.

Rory Flynn (available for interview)
Rory Flynn worked as a model in London and the US before launching a successful career as a Hollywood stills photographer. Rory maintains a website on her father (www.inlikeflynn.com) and has just published a memoir of her father and late half-brother Sean, *The Baron of Mulholland: A Daughter Remembers*, which includes private photos and letters from her father to her mother Nora.

Beverly Aadland
Beverly Aadland had been dancing (illegally) on the stage at Los Vegas since the age of 13, and was working in the chorus of the Warner Bros Gene Kelly film *Marjorie Morningstar* when she met Flynn who was another sound stage working on *Too Much, Too Soon*. She was 15, he was 48. Flynn immediately asked her to dinner and the two remained lovers and firm friends for the rest of his life. Flynn and Beverly were building a house together in Jamaica and were planning to get married. Beverly was with Flynn when he went to Cuba to meet Fidel Castro and make the documentary *Cuban Story*, and the docu-drama *Cuban Rebel Girls*. Beverly also made the heart-breaking trip to Vancouver with Errol to sell his beloved yacht the *Zaca*, but Flynn died in her arms before the sale was finalized. After Flynn’s death Beverly returned briefly to her career singing and dancing. Beverly lives not far from Los Angeles.

Kyra Pahlen
Kyra Pahlen is the daughter of filmmaker Victor Pahlen who produced *Cuban Story* with Flynn in 1959. Kyra works as a writer and producer and spends her time working between Italy, Vienna and New York. As well as working as Associate Producer on some features, Kyra also worked on the 2005 television program *The American Experience: Fidel Castro*.

Jack Marino (available for interview)
Jack Marino, actor and independent filmmaker, has been producing and directing films in Hollywood for over twenty years. His latest feature film, *Forgotten Heroes*, is an action drama about a defecting Russian General during the Vietnam War. Jack has been an Errol Flynn fan and collector, since he first read, *The Films of Errol Flynn* in 1969. It was through his subsequent friendship with Tony Thomas, that Jack got to know many of Errol Flynn’s friends, co-workers and family members. In 1988 he was able to visit Mulholland Farm many times and was there on the horrific day it was demolished. One of Jack’s most cherished possessions is Errol Flynn’s last cigarette holder, a special gift given to him by Errol’s daughter Deirdre Flynn. Jack also hosts one of the biggest Errol Flynn web sites on the internet. (http://www.warriorfilmmakers.com/errolflynn)

Ila Andrews
Ila Andrews is the last living Tasmanian who remembers Errol Flynn from his early school days, and is the proud owner of Errol’s French textbook which bears his signature. Ila recalls playing tennis with Errol who gave her a “leg up” over a locked gate; she describes Errol as being “pretty to watch.” Ila is an active member of the Errol Flynn Society of Tasmania.
PRODUCTION NOTES

_Tasmanian Devil_ filmed in Tasmania, Sydney, Los Angeles, London and Cannes. During the filming of _Tasmanian Devil_ we had the good fortune to shoot in and around many of Flynn's haunts in Los Angeles, including the house in Appian Way in which he lived with Lili Damita. It was here that Flynn's daughter Deirdre was interviewed and was able to visit the house for the first time. Sadly Flynn's favourite house, Mulholland Farm, located high above Hollywood on Mulholland Drive, was demolished in 1988.

Hobart-born Flynn had a lifelong obsession with sailing and his yachts the _Sirocco I_, _Sirocco II_, and later the _Zaca_, provided him with nautical and sexual pleasures and enabled Flynn to escape from his families and domestic responsibility, studio bosses and difficulties on studio sets. Apart from his role in _Robin Hood_, Flynn is probably best remembered for his various sea-faring roles.

Flynn's life is characterized by living at the margins – initially at the margins of mainland Australia in Tasmania and New Guinea, and throughout his life Flynn's rebellious and subversive streak ensured he remained on the margins of accepted moral, social and political mores. As Flynn describes in his autobiography _My Wicked, Wicked Ways_, his boats provided him with a sense of personal freedom that characterised his whirlwind life.

Flynn's life in Australia and New Guinea was in many respects a dress rehearsal for his roles in Hollywood, where he was catapulted to star status by the success of _Captain Blood_, and sea-faring, swashbuckling roles such as _The Sea Hawk_, and _The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex_.

Flynn's third, and largest boat, was the _Zaca_, purchased after the war, together with his estate in Jamaica, provided him with privacy and seclusion. The _Zaca_ was a 119-foot schooner with two masts and was a cruising yacht suitable for world cruises which had been used by the Navy for offshore patrols in World War II. It was an extremely luxurious boat with a crew of eight including a chef.

In August of 1946 Flynn organised a two-month cruise with his academic father Theodore for scientific research on behalf of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography; the trip was documented in film by Flynn (released as _The Cruise of the Zaca_ (1952). Flynn's _Zaca_ was borrowed by Orson Welles and wife Rita Hayworth for the making of the film _The Lady from Shanghai_. According to his introduction in his biography, when Flynn lost possession of Mulholland House to his first wife Lili in 1955, he virtually lived on the _Zaca_ at Palma de Majorca, Spain, for several years.

In _My Wicked, Wicked Ways_ he declares: "The only real wives I have ever had have been my sailing ships."

In the last few weeks of his life, Flynn, desperate to raise money, travelled to Vancouver with Beverly Aadland to sell his beloved _Zaca_ to help pay for a divorce from his third wife. Tragically Flynn died in Vancouver in October 1959, aged just 50, with the sale not quite completed.

Thanks to the generosity of skipper Bruno del Piaz, we were able to film onboard Flynn's favourite boat, his beloved _Zaca_, now beautifully restored and based in Monaco.

Errol's two daughters Deirdre and Rory (and behind the scenes his grandson Luke Flynn) were extremely generous during the making of _Tasmanian Devil_ and provided wonderful insights into their father's & grandfather's life and work.

There is an army of passionate Flynn biographers, scholars, societies and fans, and collectors – both amateur and professional – around the globe who assisted with the film, and _Tasmanian Devil_ could not have been completed without their enormous contribution. The result is a large number of formerly unseen private photos and footage, including rare material from ICAIC in Cuba, and photographs of Flynn during the Spanish Civil War now held in the private collection of Rudolph Stober.

Other major photographic collections include the Margaret Herrick library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Centre for Creative Photography which holds the photo archive of photographer Peter Stackpole.

We're thrilled that Flynn's last love, Beverly Aadland, shared private photos, and entrusted her only cassette copy of her performance of "Slowly" to us in for use in the film. Beverly is a very private person and now lives quietly in California with her family.
RESOURCES

The following resources are a great place to start for anyone interested in the life and career of Errol Flynn:


Rory Flynn’s website:
http://www.inlikeflyn.com

Jack Marino’s website:
http://www.warriorfilmmakers.com/errolflyn
ERROL FLYNN FILMOGRAPHY

1933 In the Wake of the Bounty
1935 The Case of the Curious Bride
1935 Don’t Bet on Blondes
1936 Captain Blood
1936 The Charge of the Light Brigade
1937 The Prince and the Pauper
1937 Another Dawn
1937 The Perfect Specimen
1938 The Adventures of Robin Hood
1938 Four’s a Crowd
1938 Dawn Patrol
1939 Dodge City
1939 The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex
1940 Virginia City
1940 The Sea Hawk
1940 Santa Fe Trail
1941 Dive Bomber
1942 They Died With Their Boots On
1942 Desperate Journey
1942 Gentleman Jim
1943 Edge of Darkness
1943 Thank Your Lucky Stars
1945 Objective Burma!
1945 San Antonio
1946 Never Say Goodbye
1947 Cry Wolf
1947 Escape Me Never
1948 Silver River
1949 Adventures of Don Juan
1949 It’s a Great Feeling
1949 That Forsyte Woman
1950 Montana
1950 Rocky Mountain
1951 Kim
1951 The Adventures of Captain Fabian
1952 Mara Maru
1952 Against All Flags
1952 The Cruise of the Zaca (documentary)
1952 Deep Sea Fishing (documentary)
1953 The Master of Ballantrae
1954 Crossed Swords
1955 Let’s Make Up aka Lilacs in the Spring (British release)
1955 The Warriors aka The Dark Avenger (British release)
1955 King’s Rhapsody
1956 Istanbul
1957 The Big Boodle
1957 The Sun Also Rises
1958 Too Much Too Soon
1958 The Roots of Heaven
1959 Cuban Rebel Girls
1959 Cuban Story (documentary)
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Sharyn Prentice has extensive hands-on experience developing, producing and making documentaries in Australia and internationally for over 20 years. Most recently she has executive produced/produced a series of international co-productions including *Tasmanian Devil: the Fast and Furious Life of Errol Flynn* (ABC, ZDF ARTE, BBC, AVRO, YLE and others), a major feature documentary *See What Happens* about the legendary American filmmakers DA Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus (ARD ARTE, BBC, YLE, NPS) and *Beyond the Royal Veil* about the changing roles of two royal families of India (SBSi, ZDF Arte).

Other films include *Holy Rollers* a wry look at Christian pilgrimage among the tensions in Israel (SBSi), *Visions of Yankalilla* about an apparition of the Virgin Mary on a church wall in South Australia (SBSi) and *The Wedding Sari Showdown* (SBSi) about the seismic fall-out when a young Indian couple elope.

Sharyn is active in all aspects of the industry and among other things has served on the board of the Australian International Documentary Conference, and broadly as an educator, consultant and mentor.

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Simon is former political reporter and foreign correspondent who has worked in more than 30 countries and lived in half a dozen. He began work as a reporter for *The Age* before moving to the paper’s Canberra bureau. Later he joined the ABC as political correspondent before appointment abroad as South Asia correspondent based in New Delhi and later as a travelling reporter for the SBS *Dateline* programme.

In the 1980s he became a freelance journalist working for leading international newspapers and broadcasters including the BBC and the Observer. After three years he returned to Australia but was soon on a plane again as a presenter of the popular science show, *Beyond 2000* which was shown throughout the world.
In 1989 he returned to Europe and with another former ABC foreign correspondent founded Pilot Productions, and independent production house making making documentaries and factual television from London. Among many successes was the long running Lonely Planet series which is still being made more than a decade after it launched. For several years Simon lived and worked in Eastern Europe running Pilot’s Budapest office. In the mid 90s he took a sabbatical to teach at the European Film School in Denmark before returning to work with a number of major production houses in London and New York. His award winning documentaries have shown in more than 70 countries and won major awards.

After 15 years abroad, Simon and his family returned to live in Australia in 2004 to take up the challenge of exporting real Australian stories to the world. These have included the story of a remarkable polar submarine expedition led by South Australian explorer, Sir Hubert Wilkins, Voyage of the Nautilus; a biography of the remarkable photographer Frank Hurley in The Man Who Made History and Tasmanian Devil: The fast and furious life of Errol Flynn. Simon is also writing and directing a major historical project for Film Australia and the ABC marking the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

In 2005 he published a best-selling biography of Sir Hubert Wilkins, The Last Explorer, and is currently completing a new work on non-fiction.

Simon is married with two teenage children and lives in Sydney’s Northern Beaches.

Robert de Young – Producer / Writer
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Robert de Young has a longstanding interest in the work of Errol Flynn. In 2003 he produced a radio documentary for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio National on Flynn’s career and Australian, and in 2004 adapted Flynn’s autobiography My Wicked, Wicked Ways, also for ABC Radio National. Convinced it was time for a new television documentary on Flynn, Robert began research for Tasmanian Devil. Together with a background as a producer in ABC radio drama & features, Robert has worked extensively for ABC TV as a director, producer, series producer, executive producer and commissioning editor. Since leaving the ABC Robert has worked independently as a radio and television producer and teaches media production and popular culture at a university in Melbourne. Robert is currently researching and producing a documentary on actor Christopher Lee.

Karin Steininger – Editor
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Karin Steininger is one of Australia’s most talented and awarded documentary editors. Karin has worked extensively in the UK and Australia on many documentaries, series, commercials and music clips and has cut a range of international co-production documentaries including Dying to Leave (2003) winner of the Gold Logie (Australia) and a Walkley Award (Australia), and Anne Frank Remembered, winner of 1996 American Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and winner of an International Emmy among a swag of other prizes and nominations.
END CREDITS

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SOUND MIX
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MUSIC MIX
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COMMERCIAL MUSIC
Pink Martini
‘Let’s Never Stop Falling in Love’ & ‘Lilly’
Guy McDonough & James Reyne ‘Errol’

ADDITIONAL VOICES
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Nell Feehney
Gary Files
WITH THANKS
Errol Flynn Society of Tasmania
Garry Stewart
Brian Twist
Karl Holmberg
Anthony Socic
Snowden Becker
Alan and Meredith Silverbach
Delvan Irwin
Luke Flynn
Karen and Bill Figilis
Ventura Sala
Luther Greene
Annamaria Tallas
William Donati
Thomas Scalzo
Ralph Schiller
David De Witt
Maxine Baker
Elias Savada
Bruno Dal Piaz and crew of the Zaca

In Memory Vincent Sherman (1906-2005)

ARCHIVE
Beverley Aadland
Absolutely Wild Visuals
Academy of Motion Picture
Arts and Sciences
Academy Film Archive
Archives Office of Tasmania
Audiovisuales ICAIC
Australian Picture Library (Corbis)
Beyond International
British Movietone
British Pathé/ITN Source
Budget Films Stock Footage
Center for American History, University of Texas
Center for Creative Photography
Co-Producer’s Corporation
Curtis Brown (Aust) Pty Ltd
Dept of Special Collections, Charles E Young Research Library, UCLA
Estate of Tony Thomas
Footage Hollywood
Friars’ Club, NY
Getty Picture Library
Harper Collins Publishers
Historic Films NY
ITN Archive Australia
Kobal Collection
Lincoln Hurst
Thomas McNulty
Mark Massari
Margaret Herrick Library
Museum Victoria
National Film and Sound Archive, Australia
Random House
Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group
Kyra Pahlen
Producers Library
Real Pictures
SabuCat Productions Inc
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UCLA Film and Television Archives
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