



A village in occupied Europe 1943. A high ranking Waffen SS officer has been killed by the resistance and as a consequence the entire population of the village has been rounded up and brought to a nearby farm for execution.



A British born SoE agent is suspected of masterminding the assassination of the SS officer. She has been arrested and is being driven to the farm for execution by an army officer, his driver and a Dutch born soldier.



Bundesarchiv - Bild 1011720-000-02A
Foto: Ueemann, Wolfgang 1. Juni 1944 Mitte

As they pass through the farm, she sees from the Kubelwagen the devastation of the executions. The entire village has been massacred at the farm - a blood stained mattress placed against a shed wall, and a parked lorry with corpses piled high in the back.



The officer orders the driver to stop in the farm. He takes the female prisoner and stands her against a white wall. He moves back and fumbles the leather pistol holster on his uniform belt. However, instead of pulling out a pistol, he pulls out a camera. He proceeds to take photographs of the woman as if she were a photographic model. Returning the camera to his holster, he gesticulates for the woman to get back in the Kubelwagen. They drive out of the farm to a secluded part of an open field. Here, the resistance agent will be shot by machine gun mounted on the vehicle's body.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101/301,100-21
F. 020, October 1, 1944, Sommer



The officer in charge of her execution takes a moment to savour the situation. He calmly lights up a cigar, orders the woman to stand by a hedge. Her hands are tied. He can't face up to her execution so he makes an excuse and walks away turning his back on the scene.





The soldier – a Dutch born conscript prepares his machine gun.



The soldier warns the woman (in English) not to look at the barrel of the gun. She looks away. As she looks away the conscript turns the gun on the officer, not the woman. He opens fire and the officer falls face first to the ground. The soldier approaches the woman, cuts the rope that binds her hands and he falls to the floor smiling and laughing. Shocked, she assumes that he wants to rape her and so she lifts her dress. He shakes his head and orders her to run. He tells her, in English, that he is Dutch and an unwilling conscript. He has been ordered to kill 500 people and as a Christian feels himself condemned to hell, but believes that if he can spare her life, he might yet be redeemed in the eyes of God.

Part 2:

England: the present. Christiana, the great niece of the resistance agent (Marian), has been reading from her aunt's autobiography, the contents of which form the narration. In the book, the aunt describes just how close she came to death and the debt she owes the young Dutch soldier.

The aunt had kept her wartime work a secret until just before her death and the publication of her memoirs entitled: *'The Beautiful Spy'*. Now her secret is out and a Dutch film crew are recording her story to include in a documentary they're making about Dutch collaborators. Christiana is helping the film crew who are interviewing her for the story. It is her narration that forms the basis of this story. It is an emotional moment for Christiana. She was very close to her late aunt and shared many of her traits. She looks just like her, too, and the crew comment on this by comparing an old wartime photo. Christiana tells them that her aunt was more like a mother or grandmother to her and that when she visits the site where her aunt's ashes were scattered, she can see in her mind's eye her aunt smiling at her from a distance. Marian has left in her will to her widowed niece a farm to live on and the old Rover car that she used to drive.

The interviewee and producer, Martine, suggests a shot of Christiana speaking to camera. The cameraman, Dirk, warns Christiana not to look directly at the lens, just like the Dutch soldier warned Marian not to look directly at the gun barrel. He is very much like the soldier in appearance and he and Marian feel a reciprocal attraction. When the interview is over and the crew go to leave, Dirk and Christiana promise to remain friends and stay in touch. "You promise you'll keep in touch this time?" she asks him. "This time?" he replies. "Not sure what I meant by that," replies Christiana, "But you will keep in touch, won't you?" "Of course!" replies Dirk. "This time, I'll keep in touch."



The Dutch documentary film crew who are making a film about Dutch collaborators. (Martine centre and Christiana to her right.)

Narration:

“It was our job to set Europe alight ... I had by that point come to terms with my fate: riding in that Kubelwagen up the stony track to the farm, ducking my head under low branches as if somehow it mattered. The stony track, the stony expressions on my captors – Herr Major and the driver. Then, suddenly, the stony track became a lane and the ride was smooth.

“I wanted to have the courage to throw myself off the side of the vehicle. That in doing so I would break my neck and so infuriate my executioners by robbing them of their prize; but something – some voice inside warned me against such a folly. So I sat tight.

“I felt like a passenger – not just sat there on the back of the car, but in my own body. It was as if my soul was making preparations for flight and that the body I had occupied was now becoming a separate entity that soon I would no longer have a need for. A bit like a pilot jumping out of his burning plane with a parachute strapped to his back.

“The farm when we entered was a ‘dead’ farm. No people, no animals, no sounds that you would expect in what must have been a vibrant, happy family home. There was the odd lowly private soldier still clearing up the debris of blood and flesh and bodies, and they stood for a moment to salute the arrival of the Major.

“Heaped onto a flatbed truck and a farm wagon were the ghastly last remaining bloody remnants of two neighbouring villages. Men, women and children – their carcasses in full view for me to see ready now for transportation to where I didn’t know. This was why I was the last. This was what confronted me because I had caused it. I was behind the assassination of SS Sturmen Fuehrer Greiser. Without my intervention, these bodies before me would have been walking, talking and going about their business.

“Not that I killed Greiser personally, but I loaded the gun, and I armed the bomb with its detonator. My intelligence placed these villages directly in the firing line. They paid the price with their lives knowing nothing of me, the SoE, or what I’d done to bring about such a vile catastrophe.

“So, I should see all this human mess like a puppy being made to confront its own excrement. Soaking red mattresses placed against the barn wall, not so that they, the victims, should have somewhere soft to fall. That is not the Nazi way. The mattresses prevented ricochets.

“The car stopped abruptly as if the driver had been expecting to take me further than this. The Major got out – tall and stiff limbed, his back clearly troublesome. ‘Rouse,’ he said, quite calmly – no hysterics. Obediently, I got out though partly pulled by a soldier but determined that I should hold my head high before death took its punch.

“The Major motioned me toward the wall and it was then that my breathing – I was actually hyperventilating not that I realised it then – you don’t think or know anything before death strikes believe me; but I knew this: my silent prayer was that he must aim at my heart. Not my face, head or my privates – just a shot to my heart would be humane, if humane they could be.

“Better than hanging. Silly thought, but it’s just something that I had always feared – hanging. I thought, too, that in such a circumstance I would fight to the last and go down grasping the throat of my executioner. Yet, here I was meekly standing. I couldn’t think of a prayer.

“The Major’s left hand fumbled at his holster. A single shot if you please. I’d switched off by then – almost baled out of my burning hurricane.

“But from the holster he pulled out a camera. He pulled out a camera of all things and unfolded it to take photographs. He was going to shoot me with a camera! I was to be his model. Tears rolling down my cheeks. I could scarcely make out through the cascade of my weeping eyes as he focused the lens. I don’t know whether he set the focal plain to f.8 or whether he set the shutter speed to 500, all I know is that he snapped away as if I were the subject of his assignment and not his condemned prisoner. The photography seemed to ease his tension and he came closer, put out his hand and wiped away a tear with his finger.

“Then, it was over just as strangely as it had begun. He ordered me back onto the car – a kubelwagen I now know – and we drove on leaving the farm with just a driver, the Major and me.

“We drove into a field, not far just a little way, this time stopping at a hedgerow. The driver turned the engine off where before it had been left running. The photography had been nothing more than a torture game – the cat playing with its mouse. Now, the game had to come to its end.

“The Major ordered the driver to attend to him for orders. ‘Kommen sie bitte mit mere.’ The soldier then turned back to me, ordered me out and stood me against the hedge tying my hands. First the wall, now the hedge. For him, there was a gun to prepare; not a pistol, but a machine gun. The type of weapon I’d heard from a distance. It doesn’t rat-a-tat-tat like a British or American gun. It spits extremely rapid fire is all I can say.

“I was strangely calm. I accepted my fate, if that’s possible. There would be no more tears, no weeping. I would look my executioners in the face.

“To my astonishment, the Major, however, could not look me in the face. He’d lit a cigar and was now turning to walk away. He hadn’t the stomach for a cold-hearted execution, so he turned to walk back to the farm.

“This is so often the way in war. Those at the top who order the death and destruction do not themselves pull the trigger or press the button. Hitler didn’t personally kill anyone in the second world war, least not to my knowledge. Nor did Himmler, Goebbels, Hess, Goering or any of that dastardly gang. It was the minions who did the killing on their behalf whilst those at the top of the tree supped stolen tea and coffee from swastika adorned china cups and saucers.

“How dare he walk away!” I thought. Yes, I was indignant! The soldier was preparing his gun just like the Major had prepared his camera. He didn’t want to miss. I wanted it to be quick and painless.

“Suddenly, in English, the soldier called out to me: ‘Don’t look directly at the barrel. Look away!’ So I did – obedient to the last.

“That awful sound. At first, I couldn’t understand why I could hear the gun’s roar so deafeningly clearly. I was dead. How could I hear this? Has death got no definition? No pain? No senses that tell you that your life has been extinguished in such a vile manner? Was this a nightmare? No thump of a bullet, no buckling of the knees, no gasp for breath?

“That’s when I looked back toward the gun. It had clearly been an almighty mistake. It was the Major lying face down in the grass; the gun was facing him – not me. And do you know what I thought then? Poor, poor soldier. He’ll be in for it. They’ll kill him now. He’s shot his own commanding officer. He must have lost his marbles, lost control of his senses. He must have made some almighty mistake.

“Shaking, he walks toward me, smiling as if he’s relieved, as if he’d been planning it all along: then laughing like a crazed maniac inebriated on killing, turns me around and unties my hands before collapsing to the ground in fits of hilarity and genuine

remorse, if that's possible. I assume the poor man had lost all his mental faculties and so I surrender to him.

"But he didn't want me ..."

"Thank you, Christiana. Erm, hold it there, would you? We'll stop for a moment before going on. I can see that it's hard for you, yes?"

"It just brings tears to my eyes – Sorry!"

"No need to apologize!"

"Ooh, - my aunt was such an amazing lady. But this gets me every time I read it."

"And your parents knew nothing about her story?"

"My parents, my grandparents – nobody knew! She kept it a secret from everyone all her life."

"Just as well she wrote it all down in her memoirs."

"Yes, almost too late, but at least we know now what she did and what she went through."

"She escaped through Spain, didn't she?"

"Eventually, yes. She was a very brazen lady walking up to policemen and German soldiers asking directions and believing that the best way to hide was to be in full view. It worked!"

"Clearly. Do you think she'd approve of our making a documentary?"

"Yes! She loved television. Thought it was the greatest invention. She liked people, you know. She held no grudges, which, I think is remarkable. Look at the sign above my head. She brought that back from Bavaria – had a German pen friend for much of her life. You have to forgive, she said, otherwise the hate just goes on and it gets you in the end."

"How old ..?"

"She was 93. When she wrote this book, she said that she'd always wanted to know what happened to the soldier who spared her. She said, that she had often tried to find him after the war, but she didn't even have a name to go on, so it was pretty fruitless. I hope he survived like she did."

"I hope so too."

"Can we do another shot of you just looking across the table?"

"Yes, sure."

(Cameraman) "Don't look directly into the lens. Look to the side – toward Martine."

(Martine) "Maybe you could be looking at the text in your aunt's book – she called it 'The Beautiful Spy'?"

"Yes, it was the title of a silly song she loved by Jack Hilton and Pat O'Malley. A hit before the war, I understand. (Pause) Do you know what became of the Dutch soldier?"

Martine shakes her head.

Cut

"Sometimes we drive to the spot where we scattered my aunt's ashes. It's a beautiful spot. We drive in her old car, the one she bought just after the war and kept it all her life. She bequeathed it to me. It drives really well despite being 65 years old.

"And it may sound silly, but I can see her you know in my mind's eye. She's young again and she smiles and waves to me as we're leaving that spot, and I wave back. I'm sure you'll think I'm silly."

"Not at all."

Cut

“You’ll let me know when the film is ready to see?”

“Of course.”

(To the cameraman) “Keep in touch this time, won’t you?”

“This time?”

“Ah! Slip of the tongue. Erm, not sure where that came from? But, what I mean is, drop us a line – you have my email. And if you’re back in this part of the country?”

“Yeah, I’d like that – really. And you must come to Holland? I will show you Neimegen. I will find a bicycle for you.”

“I’ll take you up on that.”

End.