

Who's been waiting for a thorough overview of the 360,000 reels of motion picture film housed at the Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Branch, Special Media Archives Services Division of the National Archives and Records Administration? Well, the wait is over! *America's Film Vault: A Reference Guide to the Motion Pictures Held by the U. S. National Archives*, compiled and edited by Phillip W. Stewart and published by the woefully named PMS Press of Crestview, Florida, is the essential guide to miles and miles of film stock compiled, preserved, and housed by the U. S. government.

Hats off to Stewart, who managed to comprehensively organize such voluminous amounts of information. Spend some time with *America's Film Vault* and his methods become clear. The largest divisions of the book are by civilian, military, and donated films. After that, things get more complicated. There are lengthy title and subject indexes, while the book is organized by 349 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Groups (RG) of government or donated motion pictures. The book cites 1,466 specific film titles that are examples within each group, and includes a 2,132 item subject index. Note that's *examples* within each group. The descriptive specifics of each reel of film is so mind-numbing to contemplate, much less catalog, that no one has yet dared without guarantees of immortality and unlimited supplies of Valium.

Given his background, Phillip W. Stewart would seem to be the perfect fellow to amass *America's Film Vault*. He has a B.S. in Radio/TV/Film from San Diego State University, and an M.A. in Business Management from Webster College in Missouri. He is now a retired Lt. Colonel of the U.S. Air Force, where he worked for over twenty years. He volunteers as motion picture researcher for the National Museum of the Air Force, hence his combined backgrounds come full circle to the films cited in *America's Film Vault*.

One doesn't review this book; one takes bites out of it. It certainly isn't something to read cover to cover, unless you're the nerd's nerd. It's a quintessential reference tool, and as such part of the fun is cracking it open to any page to see what's inside. There's no end to the obsolescences here. Page 138 — MOVING IMAGES RELATED TO "THE ROSWELL REPORTS."; UFOs — cool! Page 70 — MOTION PICTURE FILMS FROM THE "VISION USA"; PROGRAM SERIES, 1972-1979 . . . *Vision USA, No. 19* — Hang Gliding, a Stained Glass Artist, Movies, Pilobolus Dance Theatre, and Artificial Corneas, 1974. (That's just one episode. There are seven others archived.) Page 178 — The Harmon Foundation Collection of MOTION PICTURE FILMS ON COMMUNITY AND FAMILY LIFE, EDUCATION, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, AND THE ART AND CULTURE OF MINORITY AND ETHNIC GROUPS, ca. 1930-1953. Episode titles include *Poland*, *The American Indian: When the White Man Came and After*, *China War*, *Negro Notables: Negro Education and Art in the U.S.*, *Africa Film Project: Mission Achievement*, and *Ceramics is a Disciplined Art*.

Despite the title of that last entry, the collections here aren't particularly family friendly. Notably absent is much to do with the sociology of America's home life in the twentieth century — marriage, sex, adolescence, and divorce are absent as subject headings in the index. (The nearest thing is *Sex Hygiene*, a 1941 film on how World War II soldiers can avoid the clap.) Labor and education are here, but the real bulk of *America's Film Vault* is, with apologies to Scarlett



O'Hara, war, war, war. Military toys abound, from airplanes, helicopters, ships, and submarines, to missiles and rockets. There is even genuine action footage, such as American soldiers dynamiting Japanese Cyclotrons in 1945. Movie lovers will find a smattering of films about films, but most American studio entries here are newsreels such as *Paramount News* and *Fox-Movietone*. And sure enough, the rare premiere footage has a military hook to it, specifically the Washington DC opening of *The Longest Day* (above).

Then of course there are titles that look ripe for reappraisal in our timorous era. *Social Security for the Nation*, which describes "the aims of the Social Security Act of 1935; to provide economic aid to the aged, the blind, and orphaned children, and to cooperate with state agencies in establishing unemployment compensation programs." There are numerous entries on points of history, including Winston Churchill's funeral, the Roosevelts hosting King George and Queen Elizabeth, and 255 titles alone on Harry Truman. So before you make that war movie, write a historical novel, produce a tv show, chart a genealogy, redraw urban traffic, or plot the invasion of a foreign country, you'd be well advised to consult *America's Film Vault* to see what's there.

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