

## The Secret Invasion



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Produced by Gene Corman. Directed by Roger Corman. Screenplay by R. Wright Campbell. Production Management by Lou Place. Cinematography by Arthur E. Arling. Art Direction by John Murray. Original Music by Hugo Friedhofer. Edited by Ronald Sinclair. Key Costumer: Sharon Crompton.

Cinematic length: 98 minutes. Distributed by United Artists. Companies:.  
Cinematic release September 1964. The DVD release date varies by language and nationality. 2008 seems the earliest. Check for ratings. Rating 70%.

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## Cast

Stewart Granger as Major Richard Mace

Raf Vallone as Rocca

Mickey Rooney as Scanlon

Edd Byrnes as Simon Fell

Henry Silva as Durrell, the unnamed assassin

William Campbell as Jean Saval

Mia Massini as Mila

Helmo Kindermann as the German Fortress Commander

Enzo Fiermonte as General Quadri

Peter Coe as Marko

Nan Morris as Stephana

Helmut Schneider as the German Patrol Boat Captain

Giulio Marchetti as an Italian Officer

Craig March as Petar Marosevich

## Review:

*The Secret Invasion* came out as a programmer done by the Corman brothers for United Artists. Programmers were films made to be on a double bill and were fading out by the middle of the sixties. Those were the last days when going to the movies meant watching a news reel, previews and two features, the first being the lesser production - or supposedly so. Sometimes those first features were memorable. The early films of Sam Peckinpah, the works of Budd Boetticher, George Pal, Charles Marquis Warren, Richard Thorpe, the Corman brothers, the American films of Fritz Lang and others who only made a single film rose above formulas and still have an appeal. *The Secret Invasion*, while not a perfect film, is one such work.

In plot, in being an ensemble piece and in a cynical outlook this film closely resembles the sometimes more acclaimed films *Bataan* (1943), *Malaya* (1950), *Little Big Horn* (1951), *Only the Valiant* (1951), *Ill Met by Moonlight* (1957), *The Horse Soldiers* (1959), *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), *Rios Conchos* (1964), *The Heroes of Telemark* (1965) *Major Dundee* (1965) *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) *Tobruk* (1967) *Where Eagles Dare* (1968), *Too Late the Hero* (1971), *Raid on Rommel* (1971), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Z Force* (1980). Once again a group with more than its share of distrustful individualistic cynics are under the command of an officer (almost always a major) who also emerges as something of a maverick. Once again the group must go into enemy held territory on a virtual suicide mission that will have big consequences. Once again there are strains and tensions in the group.

This time the task is somewhat different. It is 1943 and Italy begins to crack in its Axis alliance. To help that crack widen and to divert two Italian diversions in Yugoslavia from the Axis war effort, their popular but rebellious commander General Quadri must be freed from German custody so that he can switch those divisions to the Allied side.

To free him from a Yugoslavian castle held by the Germans, Major Richard Mace (Stewart Granger) assembles a fine assortment of specialists from assorted prisons. Scanlon (Mickey Rooney) is an IRA explosives expert with a talent for burglary and locks, Simon Fell (Edd Byrnes) a forger and Jean Saval (William Campbell) appears as an all-round source of talented trouble. The last two in the team are the odd ones, even for this bunch. Criminal mastermind Rocco has three college degrees; ancient Greek literature, Engineering and Psychology. When

asked why he threw away his education for a life in crime he can only vaguely suggest he found his existence meaningless. Durrell (Henry Silva) has no real name or known background, says little, but kills a lot as he works as an assassin. They are joined by Yugoslav partisans and it is Durrell, the most unlikely who forms a tragic romantic bond with one of these partisans and ironically becomes the most affected by death and the most self-sacrificing for the mission's purpose.



*The Yugoslavian setting for much of the film.*

The team have a believable battle to get to General Quadri, but mercifully the plot has many unpredictable developments, revelations and ironies that put it above many secret mission films. Another advantage is the use of underused, staggeringly beautiful settings in what was then Yugoslavia. Sadly one of the film's main settings, the predominantly unspoiled medieval city of Dubrovnik, which survived the Nazis depicted in this film, would suffer much damage in the real 1990s war there. The pace is not so much fast as well done, with no time wasted. The cast have well delineated characters. The scene where Mia breast feeds the baby was a new development in cinematic freedom at that time and was

handled tastefully. The cinema audience who saw this when I first saw the film were surprised but there were no titters and the general response to the film in that audience was favorable.

There are things wrong with this film. Mickey Rooney's Irish accent does not work. Both Rocco's clicking fingers and portentous pronouncements rapidly became annoying. At times the overly loud music becomes too dominant. It is difficult to believe that a German commandant would let himself be alone with a dangerous prisoner or that the team would be in a cell able to conspire as they are unwatched. The Germans (as usual) die very quickly in great numbers, killed by a small group until the last, more realistic battle scenes.

Even so, *The Secret Invasion* attracted large audiences, getting back six times its initial budget and it was watched by somewhere over 1,800, 000 people on its initial release and it deserved that response – and more critical attention.



*Roger Corman*