

... Poles, were the Spartans had revived and saw your heroism, this brave and courageous nation would have bent their heads down in front of you ...

Julien Bryan

The Last Correspondent in Besieged Warsaw

Julien Bryan, an American documentarian and photographer, in September 1939 was in besieged Warsaw. *For several years in a row I traveled the world, making documentaries about various strange places* - wrote in his book "The Siege", released in 1940, a factual record from the besieged city. *In the summer of 1939 I went to Europe. The war was in the air* - Bryan wrote.

On the morning of September 1, Bryan was on the train from Bucharest to Warsaw. Soon after crossing the Polish border the train was bombed. The war broke out. After a multi-day and dramatic trip he arrived to Warsaw. On that day the Polish government and foreign correspondents left the city in panic. After leaving the train, Bryan was arrested and accused of spying. To be able to move freely across the city, the American met with mayor of Warsaw Stefan Starzynski. His letter, car and escort made Bryan possible to document those historic days.

He began his private war with the German machinery of propaganda on his own. His mission was not accidental, during the World War I he was a volunteer in the American Expeditionary Forces. He was an ambulance driver at the front at Verdun and Argonne and he saw the horrors of war. After Hitler's rise to power, Bryan began to document developments in Europe. His attention was focused on three cities: Berlin, Moscow and Warsaw.

In Moscow he filmed a massive military parades held for Stalin, the great maneuvers of paratroops. Bryan filmed also the famous Nazi parades in Nuremberg. For the American cinema he produced documentary film: "Inside Nazi Germany". These were the chronicles which raise awareness in America society about emerging danger. He filmed labor camps formed in Germany, the arms industry, increasing persecution of Jews. He was also in the Free City of Danzig which, however, was neither free nor quiet. He saw the approaching war also there.

Julien Bryan is not interested in photographs from the battlefield, he shows the fate of the true victims of war - civilians. He managed to hit the very essence of this new type of war that Hitler applied, a terror against civilians, a massive air strikes. Bombarded cities, roads crowded with refugees, railway junctions. Even women digging potatoes become "military object " for German airmen.

With precision and great personal courage, Julien Bryan filmed and photographed building the barricades, bombed hospitals, maternity hospitals where women gave birth to the first child of war, churches bombed during the Mass, refugees who lost the roof over their heads. Bryan shows the effects of bombing and air strikes, ruined houses, killed civilians.

A boy, with the cage with a canary inside, who is running around the pile of rubble under which his family is lying, a girl with her dog, who came back from her friend and saw only a huge hole in the ground, an old woman who became speechless and holds in her hand rescued two silver spoons, a boy sitting next to his killed mother and awaiting for his fate, and finally a girl grieving over the body of her older sister. These images can not be forgotten.

Bryan appealed to President Roosevelt for help on the radio. Doing this he gained immense gratitude of Warsaw citizens. For many of them his presence was encouragement, hope that the world would learn about the tragedy of their city and country, abandoned by the Allies, that there were still some foreigners who wanted to do something for this fighting nation.

After Bryan returning from Poland his photographs and articles were posted in two biggest weekly magazines: "Life" and "Look". The photo with a girl crying over the body of her killed sister saw people all around the world, and it has become a symbol of the cruelty of the Germans. Bryan produced the first chronicle of the World War II. The documentary was seen by almost 300 million people all over the world. The chronicle prophetically revealed what fate would face soon other European cities, it overthrew a myth of German soldier and his bravery and chivalry.

The suffering of the Warsaw population was not in vain. The American society was alerted by films, photos and articles of Julien Bryan, who dispelled their illusion of isolationism. America built a powerful army, a huge coalition was created, and thus democracy was saved. And in this way the nobility and courage of one man affected the fate of the world.

How brave must be your soldiers, since society has taken an attitude of the bravest soldier. I am telling this as a former soldier. Being at the front of Verdun, I have not faced even there with such a remarkable attitude, so much heroism and self-sacrifice as in Warsaw. Weird and wonderful facts speak for yourselves.

Julien Bryan

Eugene Starky