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## Presidents on Film

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## Presidents on Film January Update

*By Laura Bulkeley Goldsmith*

The cable network, A&E, is in the planning stages to mark the 60th anniversary of D-Day with a film about the invasion's Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Ike: Thunder in June is slated to be completed by Memorial Day 2004.

Ike begins in March of 1944 and traces the 90 days leading up to the June 6 invasion. Selleck, hardly an Eisenhower look-alike, told the Television Critics Association, "Great men are great not because of what they look like; they're great because of who they are. The actor's job is to somehow capture the spirit of the character."

Eisenhower's legacy appears to be in good hands. The screenwriter is Lionel Chetwynd, a writer/producer/director who has a long career extolling the virtues of towering individuals and realizing fascinating historical dramas, docudramas, and documentaries for the big screen and television. His last film as writer/producer was the 2003 TV movie, DC 9/11: Time of Crisis. Rendering George W. Bush an heroic figure might have been career suicide in these politically charged times, but Chetwynd is no stranger to controversy. His 1987 feature, Hanoi Hilton was not a critical success -- in fact, it was vilified by many critics at the time -- but many Vietnam veterans hailed its brutally honest portrayal of the torture United States' prisoners of war experienced at the hands of the Viet Cong.

Chetwynd's rationality, clarity, and honesty are such rarities in the "culture war" that he is often trotted out as a token "conservative" (a term far too inadequate to describe him) in politically-oriented discussions, as in the documentary Hollywood, D.C., filmed in 2000. This production of the Bravo cable channel explored the intimate relationship between the entertainment industry and the political community which began in the early 20th century. It featured, alongside Chetwynd, Ed Asner, Martin Sheen, and Oliver Stone. I personally attended two industry forums in which Chetwynd participated. He calmly and clearly discussed issues such as liberal bias in the movie business, free speech, political correctness, and intellectual freedom, in a quite volatile atmosphere, fraught with career peril. Still, Chetwynd has written and produced documentaries for PBS, has been a member of the faculty of New York University's Graduate Film School, a lecturer on screenwriting for the Frederick

Douglass Center in Harlem and currently UCLA, is a member of the Canadian Bar Association, and has served on numerous committees for the Writers Guild of America and The Caucus for Television Producers, Writers, and Directors (<http://www.caucus.org>), which promotes "better and more meaningful television."

I have nothing but admiration of the man, and recommend his films. The following are featured on our "American Presidents on Film" list: The Adams Chronicles (1976), Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye (1977), Kissinger and Nixon (1995), and DC 9/11: Time of Crisis (2003).

While discussing the upcoming film, its screenwriter says, "We take it for granted now that D-Day was the success that it was. The outcome was very much in doubt at the time. We try (in the screenplay of the upcoming film) to capture that doubt, that sense of 'Will this damn thing work?' and the tremendous burden that was on the shoulders of Eisenhower."

Chetwynd and star Selleck will begin filming Ike in New Zealand in February 2004 in an effort to introduce a new generation to the world-changing achievement of the brave soldiers of D-Day. May the film do justice to their Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, a man whom Chetwynd so accurately describes as one of remarkable "confidence, leadership, and character."

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*Laura Bulkeley Goldsmith is a graduate of the University of Georgia with a BA in English. She has her Master's Degree from Northwestern University in radio-TV-film. From 1991 to 1996, she was an associate editor of two separate media newsletters, "Between the Lines," and "Dispatches," writing articles on popular culture. She is currently a film historian and freelance writer.*