

'The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare' isn't flawless, but it completes its mission

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time:
120 minutes

This feature from Lionsgate Films opens exclusively at theaters on Friday, April 19.

Over the last few years, filmgoers have seen a great many war films, often detailing harrowing battles and the resulting personal loss. *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare* is a World War II feature inspired by true events. However, this one features a lighter touch than those we've recently become accustomed to. It's strange to describe this kind of a picture as, well, enjoyable, but the film's charismatic cast and humorous repartee sells the tone effectively.

With much of Europe under Nazi control and German U-boats cutting off the United Kingdom and Ireland from supply lines, many officials suggest that Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Rory Kinnear) admit defeat and surrender. Instead, he and Brigadier Grubbins 'M' (Carey Elwes) come up with a last-ditch effort to turn the tide in the conflict. They recruit convict Gus

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March-Phillipps (Henry Cavill) to lead a covert operation on a Spanish island off the coast of Africa with a Nazi port. Their mission is to destroy essential German U-boat supplies including weapons and air filters.

March-Phillipps agrees and recruits a team of unscrupulous associates like Anders Lassen (Alan Ritchson), Henry Hayes (Hero Fiennes Tiffin), Freddy Alvarez (Henry Golding) and Geoffrey Appleyard (Alex Pettyfer). Meanwhile, agent Majorie Stewart (Eiza Brigadier Grubbins) and local businessman Mr. Heron (Babs Olusanmokun) arrive early onsite to distract and disarm Nazi official Heinrich Luhr (Til Schweiger).

Even though the situations being presented involve life-or-death scenarios, humor is emphasized from the opening scene onward. And, as March-Phillipps is taken into a British command center and begins stuffing his pockets with cigars (and anything else he can get his hands on) during his initial interview, the cheeky tone is further emphasized. In fact, the film very quickly comes across like a *James Bond* picture (there is even an entertaining reference to the author of the superspy novels) mixed with gun-toting action as the leads take down baddies in an occasionally gleeful manner.

Thankfully, the excellent cast sells this exaggerated material. Cavill delivers as March-Phillipps, a wisecracking leader who may be underhanded and refuses to take orders from superiors, but possesses a clear drive to help stop fascism. Some of his comebacks to superiors during lighter moments are particularly funny.

His team members are broadly drawn, but they do provide laughs playing off of each other. Muscleman Lassen makes a notable impression as a big physical threat and expert with a bow and arrow, doing away with dozens of bad guys at a time in exaggerated ways. Additionally, brutal antagonist Luhr is imposing and unsettling, allowing the picture to maintain tension, especially during taut moments with spy Stewart as he attempts to get a read on her intentions.

Despite having a smaller budget than a big Bond movie, the set pieces are well-handled by director Guy Ritchie (*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Gentlemen*, *Guy Ritchie’s The Covenant*). The opening conflict in close-quarters is dynamic, as is a raid on a German prison and the larger scale finale on a dockyard. As mentioned, it is played in an old-fashioned manner with the characters frequently cracking jokes as bodies fall around them, but the charismatic performers pull it off.

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There are minor issues here and there. Curiously enough, the nature of the story keeps March-Phillipps and his team separate from the primary villain. At times, it feels like there are two individual stories going on (one with the team, and the other involving Stewart and Luhr) that only intersect very briefly toward the close. Regardless, it gels together well enough that this doesn’t become a major sticking point.

This movie may not be a war classic, but it is a fun throwback to action pictures (and even espionage films) of the 1960s and 70s where sides were clearly defined and heroes would deliver swift justice to villains. And the fact that it is loosely based on a real operation is an added plus, informing viewers about some previously unknown efforts of the Allied war effort. *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare* isn’t flawless, but it completes its mission effectively.

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