

**DER ANSTÄNDIGE**  
**THE DECENT ONE**



**A Film by Vanessa Lapa**

**Israel, Austria, Germany 2014 / 96'**

<https://www.facebook.com/TheDecentOneFilm?fref=ts>

[www.thedecentonefilm.com](http://www.thedecentonefilm.com)

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**Cast**

Tobias Moretti  
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Florentin Groll  
Lotte Ledl  
Tom Zahner

Antonia Moretti  
Pauline Knof  
Lenz Moretti  
Markus Riexinger

Alexander Riemann  
Thomas Zerck  
Martin Lalis  
Florian Wandel

**Credits****Script:**

Vanessa Lapa  
Ori Weisbrod

**Archive Image:**

Hermann Poelking-Eiken

**Editors:**

Sharon Brook  
Noam Amit

**Restoration Artists:**

Or Shkolnik  
Nataly Yaniv

**Sound Designer:**

Tomer Eliav

**Original Score:**

Jonathan Sheffer  
Daniel Salomon  
Gil Feldman

**Grading:**

Yoav Raz

**Documents DOP:**

Jeremy Portnoi

**Picture Animation**

Miklos Falvay

**Post Production Supervisor:**

Mor Tregger

**Research:**

Dorothea Otto  
Sarah Strebelow  
Steve Rogers  
Oriana Almasi

## The Decent One

*"The best political weapon is the weapon of terror. Cruelty demands respect. Men may hate us, but we don't ask for their love; only for their fear and their submission."*

Heinrich Himmler

### Synopsis

On May 6th 1945, soldiers of the US Army occupied the Himmler family home in Gmund Germany where they discovered hundreds of private letters, documents, diaries and photographs. The film makes use of these materials to sketch the biography and expose the inner mind, ideals, plans and secrets of SS commander, the architect of the Final Solution - Heinrich Himmler.

How did this Catholic nationalistic middle-class young man become Hitler's henchman responsible for masterminding, developing and executing the strategies that led to the murder of millions of Jews, homosexuals, Communists and Romany people? Where did his ideology originate? How did he see himself and how was he perceived in private by his wife Margarete, his daughter Gudrun and his mistress Hedwig? How could the man who often referred to so-called German virtues such as order, decency and goodness also write home in the midst of the war and Holocaust: 'Despite all the work I am doing fine and I sleep well'? How can a man become a hero in his own eyes but a mass murderer in the eyes of the world?

*"In life, one must always be decent, courageous and kind-hearted."*

Himmler to his daughter Gudrun,  
1941

### Short Synopsis

Through previously undiscovered private letters, photos and diaries that were found in the Himmler family house in 1945, the "**The Decent One**" exposes a unique and at times uncomfortable access to the life and mind of the merciless "Architect of the Final Solution" Heinrich Himmler. Himmler writes, "In life one must always be decent, courageous and kind-hearted". How can a man be a hero in his own eyes and a mass murderer in the eyes of the world? A unique portrait of one the most prominent figures of the Third Reich: The Reichsführer-SS: Heinrich Himmler.

## **A Cinematographic Experience**

### **Text/Sound**

The text of the film consists exclusively of original documents from Himmler's lifetime, interpreted (but never re-enacted) by actors. They read the original words as they were written by Himmler, his family, his comrades, and his subordinates in the SS. The rich dialogue that emerges makes any external narration superfluous. In this film, the private and public lives of the historical protagonists do not simply take center stage. They are the entire show.

The founding principle behind "The Decent One" was to express in the most historical accurate way the reality of the Himmler's writings and of the time. The idea was to position the viewer in every scene, in the most concrete manner, considering time and space. The goal was to create a soundtrack through the cinematic experience and allow the viewer an emotional experience. How can the viewer "think with" and "feel" the movie instead of just "consume" it.

The decision to design the world of sounds, frame-by-frame, is an inseparable part of the film restoration and cleaning process, and stemmed from the desire to move the cinematic experience forward, and more powerfully. This is not to say that we edited "silence" out. In fact, this decision provides huge room to represent silence as of great significance. Where we decided to remain silence, we left space for statements of special significance. In other words, silence became a vehicle, no less than the music or the text itself.

### **Visuals**

The visual elements that transform this script into a 90-minute feature film are meticulously researched original archival film footage and photographs from 1900 to 1945. Excerpts from early documentaries, newsreels, early feature films, and amateur films of everyday life in the 1930s and 1940s bring the dialogues to life. Certain details are highlighted, while other are juxtaposed against similar accounts, in order to challenge the viewer's preconceptions of these historical eras. For example, the infamous concentration of Dachau is described as it appears in Himmler's daughter Gudrun's diary as the site of a pleasant field trip with Mummy, not a place of suffering and death. Throughout the film, every effort is made to find authentic personal images and footage, rather than any staged footage used for propaganda purposes.

In addition to the material in the archive, researchers collected personal photos and footage from countless other sources, ranging from the descendants of top Nazis to working class individuals, like the baker of Dachau, who happened to live near the Himmler family. **Much of this film has never been seen before, even by the people who owned it, and has only been developed for this film.** Among the surprising materials are 10 seconds of a teenage Himmler walking through Munich right after World War I. As far as anyone knows, this is the first time Himmler ever appeared on camera.

In contrast, though the war was raging throughout much of the story, there is no footage from the front lines. This is in keeping with the two principles of maintaining authenticity and avoiding propaganda pieces.

The final result is: 151 different sources from 53 different private and public archives in 13 different countries.

## About the director

Born and raised in Belgium, **Vanessa Lapa** has been living in Israel since 1995. An accomplished journalist, she produced and directed over a hundred factual reportages for Israeli television. Her documentary film “OLMERT – CONCEALED DOCUMENTARY” (Israel, 2009) was hailed as a unique cinéma vérité achievement, revealing the behind-the-scenes of the government and the private life of Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Vanessa was also on the Israeli side of the production and content for the 52-minute documentary “Straddling the Fence” (USA, 2003) directed by New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, which aired worldwide. In 2007, she founded the Tel Aviv-based independent documentary film production company Realworks Ltd.

## Director’s Note

*The Decent One* attempts to expose a previously unseen perspective on an often-approached subject. The film juxtaposes personal writings and photographs from the private lives of one of the highest-ranking Nazis and his family with the reality of the time, which Himmler himself relentlessly shaped in the background. The audience is thus granted personal access to the mind of the private man Heinrich Himmler and to the experiences, ideas, and emotions that turned him into the merciless “Architect of the Holocaust”. Since the film is told from the prism of Himmler and his family – first his parents and brothers, later his wife, daughter and lover – the audience experience the world during WWI and in the Weimar Republic from an average German middle class perspective, and later on from the privileged vantage point of a high ranking Nazi family. In this film, Himmler’s subjective perceptions of the outside world and his personal involvement with political and societal developments are what drives and shapes the viewer’s cinematic experience and reveals how cruelty and evil can grow out of apparent normalcy. The audience is left with the discomfort of struggling in between the two poles of emotional closeness to the characters’ very personal writings and the appalling deeds committed on their orders.

With a dramatic script based on carefully selected pieces of true personal history and

political reality, brought to life by exclusively using actors' off voices and archival footage, ***The Decent One*** mixes documentary and fiction conventions to create a new post-documentary form. This allows the viewer to "think with" and "feel with" the film instead of simply consuming it. It strives to uncover the deepest psycho-cultural reality of the most atrocious cruelty. The fiction is as real as the horror it constructively comes to document.

We witness how cruelty can grow from an apparent normality, and when fueled by ideology, economical reality, a Fuehrer, a whole people and a state of the art technology, an individual who lacks self-confidence can become a hero in his own eyes and one of the biggest mass murderers in History.

We are curious to know more and dive into the personal lives of people who changed the world in a positive way. To dive into the personal lives of people who changed the world in a negative way, is way more uncomfortable, less attractive BUT not less interesting and probably more important.

At the core of this film there is an appeal for a cinema of insistent questioning instead of rapid foreclosure, clarifying distance in place of violating closeness, provocation and dialogue instead of consumption and consensus. Although there is no apparent guide of taking sides and making judgment, it projects a moral frame of reference urgent to our day and age: a multidimensional critical perspective as the audience's guide for empathy and individual responsibility.

## **The Himmler Private Collection – Background**

**The story of how Himmler's journals were found deserves a documentary film of its own.**

On 6 May 1945, the US Army seized the Himmler family residence in Gmund, Germany. During their stay, troops stationed discovered hundreds of personal letters, journals, and photographs of the Himmler family. Despite orders, these priceless documents were never handed over to the occupation authorities.

There are several stories about what happened next, but all that we can know for certain is that by the 1960s, the entire collection was in the possession of a Tel Aviv painter named Chaim Rosenthal, who stored it under his bed. According to one account, Rosenthal first came across the documents at a neo-Nazi convention in Dallas. Intrigued by what he had seen, he decided to track the collection, which was in the possession of an elderly man, whose car had a Mexican license plate.

Rosenthal passed away in 2012. In his will he wrote that he hoped one day, light would emerge out of evil and darkness. For that to happen, he wanted his collection to end up in trusted hands. He believed that it could best be put to use if it was brought to the attention of the public. In 2006, rumor of the unusual collection reached filmmaker Vanessa Lapa, who purchased it at the first possible opportunity.

Lapa bought the collection for one purpose: She wanted to make a film that would shed additional light on the most tragic chapter in human history. She recognized the documents' historical significance, and felt a sense of mission in bring their story to the public.

The collection is currently stored in a bank vault in Tel Aviv. Now that the film is completed, the documents will be made available to historians, academics, and the general public.

## About Evil

*The Decent One* sounds like a cynical name for biopic about one of the most brutal mass murderers the world has ever known. And it would be, if he didn't come across so damn decent.

More books have been written and more films produced about World War II than any other event in modern history, and perhaps even history in general. The "villains" of the story have always been of special interest, particularly that eclectic bunch of individuals who made up Hitler's innermost circles. Despite the best intentions of researchers and historians, these are almost universally portrayed as caricatures of evil. Even the most sensitive of researchers only try, at best, to understand what led them along that path. And as such, they fail to explain the mass appeal these people had.

In fact, the film is a warning to all of us. **Evil is not a caricature** that can be easily recognized. Even the most decent man can make the most monstrous choices. That is why it is our foremost responsibility to be forever vigilant. **Yes, we must look out for the monstrous, but even more importantly, we must also beware of THE DECENT ONES.**

## Errol Morris on *The Decent One*:

**"A fabulous excursion into the deep mystery of evil."**

Errol Morris on the Importance of The Decent One  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u09fZBFwqwo>

Errol Morris on The Banality of Evil  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byP50TNuH4w>

Q&A with Errol Morris at Brandeis University  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzUks-ivozY>

## Michael Haneke on the importance of *The Decent One*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCZgDwQPLds>

## **The Book**

Himmler's great-niece Katrin Himmler and Prof. Michael Wildt from the Humboldt University in Berlin wrote in parallel to the filmmaking a book based on the content of the collection. The book has been translated into 17 languages and is scheduled to be released in English next year by Saint Martin's Press.

## **Film Festivals**

### ***Berlinale – Berlin Film Festival (WP)***

Official Selection Panorama – Feb. 2014

### ***41st Telluride Film Festival***

Official Selection – Aug. 2014

### ***Jerusalem Int'l Film Festival, Israel***

Winner – Best Documentary – July 2014

### ***DocumentaMadrid 14, Spain***

Official Selection - May 2014

### ***DOK. Fest Munich, Germany***

Special Screening – May 2014

### ***Planete Doc Warsaw, Poland***

Official Selection – May 2014

### ***Israeli Academy Awards***

Nominated for the Ophir Prize – Aug. 2014

### ***Jameson Cinefest Miskolc, Hungary***

Official Selection – Sept. 2014

### ***Rio de Janeiro Int'l Film Festival, Brasil***

Official selection – Sept. 2014

### ***Bergen Int'l Film Festival, Sweden***

Official selection – Sept. 2014

### ***Reykjavík Int'l Film Festival, Iceland***



Official selection – Sept 2014

***Vancouver Int'l Film Festival, Canada***

Official selection- Sept. 2014

***Movies on War, NY, USA***

Official Selection – Nov. 2014

***Melbourne Jewish Int'l Film Festival, Australia***

Official Selection – Oct. 2014

***Doc Aviv Galil, Israel***

Official Selection – Nov. 2014

***Budapest Israeli Film Week, Hungary***

Official Selection – Dec. 2014

***Port Jefferson Documentary Series, USA***

Spring 2015

***ZagrebDox, Croatia***

Official Selection - March 2015

***Dublin Film Festival, Ireland***

Real to Reel - March 2015

***Focal International Awards, UK***

Nominated for Best Use of Footage in Cinema release

Nominated for Best Visual Research - May 2015

***San Francisco Documentary Festival, USA***

Official Selection - June 2015

***Ecuador International Documentary Film Festival, Ecuador***

El Dilemma de la Historia - June 2015

***The 7<sup>th</sup> DMZ International Documentary Film Festival, Korea***

Official Selection – International Competition – Sept. 2015

***Vilnius 12<sup>th</sup> Documentary Film Festival, Lithuania***

Special screenings – Sept. 2015

## Selected Press Quotes

**"A fabulous excursion into the deep mystery of evil."**

– Errol Morris

**"A chilling disconnects runs through (the film). The juxtaposition of Himmler's correspondence and German history is complex and fluid... Ms. Lapa's sources, acquired for the making of this documentary, are unusually rich (and their very quantity helps to dramatize the bureaucratic side of Nazi atrocity)... Many freshly haunting and illuminating undercurrents are brought forth."**

– Nicolas Rapold, [The New York Times](#)

**"'The Decent One' is rare film that at once advances the form of historical documentaries while simultaneously telling a riveting story from a new and wholly unanticipated and unexpected perspective. It features a wealth of new archival material, but it puts those images and voices to work in a novel way--the film is intimate, human, suspenseful, and terrifying, its momentum guided by individual self-delusion and the awful weight and fact of history."**

-- Ken Burns, Filmmaker

***"The Decent One is the most haunting documentary I've ever seen"***

-- Andrew O'Hehir, [Salon](#)

**"A virtuoso feat of documentary filmmaking."**

- Hannah Brown, [The Jerusalem Post](#)

**"A fascinating epistolary narrative."**

– Keith Uhlich, [Time Out New York](#)

**"Startling and intimate."**

– Leonard Lopate, WNYC radio

[Click here](#) to listen to Lopate's interview with director Vanessa Lapa

**"'The Decent One' a must-see not only for those of us who remain glued to just about everything that comes out of the Holocaust era but those who need to understand that no matter how evil we consider some people to be, the monstrous individuals consider themselves to be decent. "**

-- Harvey Karten, [Compuserve](#)

**"Woven together with scholarly care, this was a marrow-chilling psychological profile...It married extracts from the documents – read by actors – to a remarkable archive of film and photographs, deftly underpinned by clever use of sound...Unpleasant but, alas, essential viewing"**

– Jasper Reese, [The Telegraph](#)

**"....ingenious use of sound by Tomer Eliav to bring the footage alive..."**

– [The Art Desk](#)

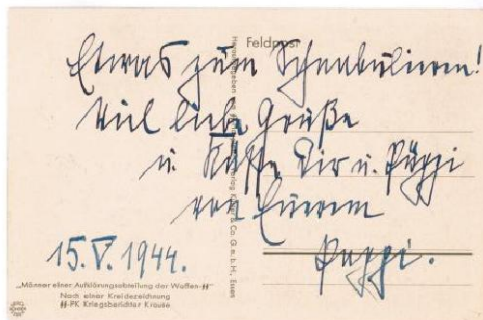
**Selected Stills, Original high quality will be supplied on demand**



1928 Marga Himmler's Nazi Party Membership Card.



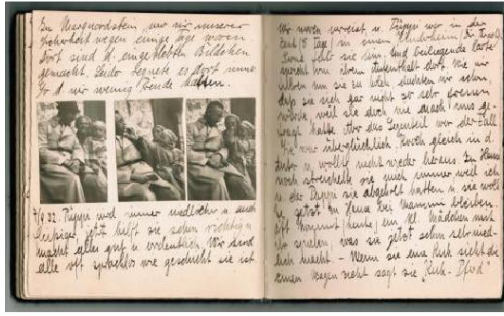
1944 Himmler with his daughter Gudrun and his wife.



1944 Himmler's Postcard.



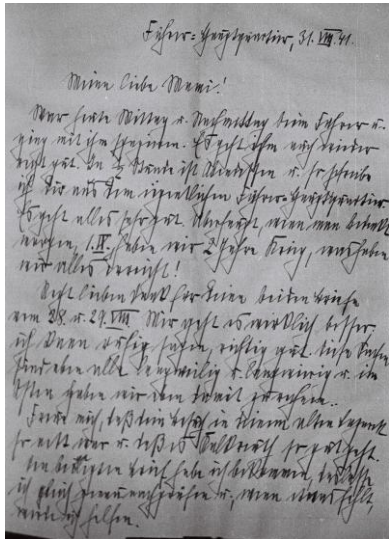
1936 Heinrich Himmler in Kiel.



1932 Marga Himmler's Diary.



Heinrich Himmler playing tennis.



1941 A letter from Heinrich Himmler to his wife Marga.



1939 The Himmler family at the Valepp.



1941 Himmler and his daughter Gudrun in Gmund, Germany.



The Collection.