

Review #52 : *Diplomatic Courier* (1952)

Tyrone Power and Hildegard Neff

TRAILER

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-OJ4HLjwXE>

Diplomatic Courier has all the familiar elements of an appealing **continental spy mystery** : State Department secrets, European trains, murderers on a train, muggings in Trieste, double dealings, chases, footpads, Soviet agents, beautiful and unpredictable dames, military police, zither music and a naturally bewildered man. It has **Tyrone Power** as its hero and **Henry Hathaway** as its director. It is fast-paced, with both **clarity and suspense**. The result is just plain delightful ! This is definitely one of the best spy films of the Fifties, extensively shot on location across Europe, from Paris to Salzburg to the international city of Trieste, and a climatic finale on the Simplon Orient Express.



SYNOPSIS

Tyrone Power is Mike Kells, a diplomatic courier tapped for a dangerous assignment almost before he can finish the one he is already on. A voice over by narrator Hugh Marlowe informs us the mission has been triggered by the most important message to be received by the State Department since the 38th Parallel was crossed in Korea — the *Semper Project*. Mike is to meet fellow courier Sam Carew in Salzburg. Sam is due to give him confidential papers to deliver to Trieste.

On his plane to Salzburg, Mike meets attractive widow Joan Ross (**Patricia Neal**) whose shoulder he had fallen asleep on during the trip. She immediately asks to see him again, but he keeps disappearing on her due to his important mission.

All this while, **Sam is being followed** then murdered by a pair of Russian thugs before he's able to deliver his message to Mike. Colonel Cagle of military intelligence sets Mike out as a stalking horse on the thugs with military policeman Ernie (**Karl Malden**) to protect him.

From that moment on, Mike Kells **races across Europe with spies on his trail**, involved with a beautiful and mysterious blonde, Janine (Hildegard Neff), whom he has seen with Sam, and wondering why Joan Ross keeps showing up. Ernie and Cagle are the only people Mike can trust, and they are using him as a staked goat in a high stakes hunt. Someone murdered his friend, and now they are trying to kill him. Ernie is the only man Mike can trust, and he is using him as a staked goat in a high stakes hunt. *Someone* murdered his friend, and now *they* are trying to kill him. Of course, it all has to do with the papers Sam was supposed to give Mike *** **SPOILER ALERT** : copies of the Soviet plan to invade and take over Yugoslavia. ***

In Trieste the stakes grow much higher, until the final confrontation with the head of Soviet intelligence in the West (**Stefan Schnabel**) in a compartment on the Orient Express – with Soviet Agents on all sides...



REVIEW

Diplomatic Courier has the advantage of a big budget, a first rate supporting cast, a strong script and storyline, **beautiful cinematography** by Lucien Ballard, taut direction by **Henry Hathaway**, one of the greatest entertainers in Hollywood, and attractive leads at the top of

their form. It's not particularly serious, but it is rapidly paced, handsomely shot, and the kind of sure fire entertainment that the old studios did with **casual brilliance**.

Tyrone Power is here self-assured, sensibly paranoid, and suitably tough. It's an **assured star performance by an actor at the top of his game**. As the drama keeps much of the plot of **Peter Cheyney's** novels, Mike's penchant for elegant deadly ladies is kept intact. Both Neal and Neff are suitably dangerous, and it is relatively late in the film before you know which side, besides their own, either is on. Both Neal and Neff have **strong scenes** and handle them well. Neal in particular walks a thin line between comedy and drama, is very good at crying credibly and has a great last line.



I think you will be impressed by this one. It's an exciting slick spy film, both **smart and entertaining**, – it hardly takes a pause for breath from the opening to the finale. You'll be almost as breathless as Power's Mike Kells by the time you get to the end. It may not be quite in a class with films like *The Third Man*, *Five Fingers*, or *North by Northwest*, but it is top notch entertainment all the way. +++