

FILM STARS' STICKY END

A Contribution to Industry

DO the film stars, the pin-up girls and men who are the objects of adoration from both sexes all over the world, realise that after about three years of life they come to a sticky end? Do they know that the heights of director-induced emotion to which they rise in their biggest scenes are eventually either cremated or used as adhesives?

If the actors and actresses whose names, in normal times, appear in big lights, were able to follow a film to its decease, they would see some peculiar things. They would see the fair face of



"Meet their deaths as burnt offerings"

Betty Grable trampled in the mud; they would see the chin bristles of tough soldiers, sailors and airmen, lathered with the features of Greer Garson; and they might even see Gary Cooper being kicked from one end of a football field to another. Probably even still more undignified uses could be found for the faces that thrill millions.

But it is not as bad as it sounds. This odd treatment of screen artists is simply the result of war and the necessity for putting waste products to the best use.

The average life of a film on tour in New Zealand is from two to three years. It depends largely on its popularity, the number of times it goes through the projectors and, of course, its box office power. But the time comes when distributors consider it expedient to write a film off. Periodically the companies' vaults become filled up with what the trade calls "junk film," that is, film which is worn out, and useless for further showing. Then may come a big burn up, for some distributors dispose of their junk by fire.

Recently, at Moa Point, Wellington, six big features went up in smoke. Included were "Nearest Thing to Heaven"

and "Mexican Spitfire." It was appropriate that films with such titles should meet their deaths as burnt offerings. Film fires are supervised by a fireman, who picks a calm day so that there will be no danger. Once it was customary to sift the ashes after a cremation and salvage the silver nitrate used in making raw film. This has been abandoned, however, and the silver is either blown away on the air or left in the residue.

From Boots to Shaving Cream

When large quantities of junk film pile up, it is sometimes thought worthwhile to sell them to concerns which can make use of them. Chemical firms have a use for old film in making adhesives; jewellers can use it after it has been treated, for setting stones. Broken china and crockery can be mended with gum made out of film. In the leather trade it is useful for repairing handbags and making and repairing boots and footballs. Occasionally a consignment is sent to Australia, where it joins other collections of junk film and eventually finds its way into the boots of Australian soldiers and airmen. It can even be used as a constituent in shaving cream.

Before film can be written off as obsolete, a good deal of formality must be observed. Distributors cannot simply say to themselves: "This stuff is done for; let's get rid of it." Once they have decided what they intend to scrap, they become involved in a complicated legal labyrinth affecting such things as the company's interests, copyright of words and music, author's rights and royalties and sundry other related considerations. An affidavit must be sworn that the film's life is over and that it will never be resurrected as a film.

Once the legal position has been settled to the satisfaction of all concerned, an extra precaution is taken to see that the film is completely unusable. It is put into a mutilating machine, which chops it up into small pieces. Then disposal by burning or otherwise can go ahead.

Recently a Wellington company disposed of 50 drums, a total of 3½ tons of glorious technicolour, comedy, tough-guy activities, and yards of music and drama. Some of that may go into the manufacture of high-class varnishes used specially in aeroplane construction.

Occasionally an operator has to make temporary repairs during a performance and the small bits he cuts out of a film are thrown away. A few years ago it was not uncommon to see small boys on their way home from school raking over the rubbish tins outside the backdoor of a theatre for bits of prized film. To-day, however, almost every piece goes its appointed way, to destruction or to a factory. It's nice to know that when a film star's shadow life is over, it contributes something to ordinary, mundane existence.

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