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Film Reviews, by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE STORY OF G.I. JOE

(United Artists)

IT never pays to generalise, even about films. Though I did leave myself a loophole by saying that there were some exceptions to the rule that the pre-Christmas period is a dull one for new pictures, I now find it necessary to eat several of my words used in this column last week. And I do so willingly, because at least two of the pictures which came my way in the week just before Christmas were far from being lightweight and undistinguished. The Story of G.I. Joe, in particular, is an outstanding American effort. A masterly example of imaginative realism, it belongs to the genre of war films in which the British, with *San Demetrio*, *The Way Ahead*, and *The Way to the Stars*, have hitherto been pre-eminent.

This film was directed by William Wellman, and those picturegoers lucky enough to have seen his *Oxbow Incident* will recognise in it the same qualities of keen observation of character, high dramatic tension, and the same understanding of the effect of environment on behaviour, whether in the individual or the group. Again, in this account of a small detachment of U.S. infantry in Tunisia and Italy, the onlooker is given the same feeling of personal involvement in the events depicted as he had in watching the lynching in *The Oxbow Incident*; and the effect is achieved in much the same way, by telling the story through an intermediary who, though caught up in the action, retains his detachment as an observer. This intermediary in the present case is the late Ernie Pyle, a noted American correspondent whose reporting of the war on the Mediterranean front won him a Pulitzer prize, and who was later killed on Okinawa.

THE film, in fact, is ostensibly the story of Ernie Pyle himself; but it is much more the story of Company C, of the 18th U.S. Infantry, the group to which Pyle attached himself at the beginning in North Africa and to which he became so attached as he followed their fortunes through Sicily, up the long hard road to Rome, and into the inferno of Cassino. Pyle (as memorably played by Burgess Meredith) is in the film, as he was in real life, merely the modest, honest chronicler, never obtruding himself between the camera and the actors—some of them Hollywood professionals, some actual combat veterans, but all first-class artists—who portray the soldiers, those soldiers about whom Pyle once used these words: "No one knows what it's like. . . . Up in the sky they die well-fed and clean-shaven. But the infantryman—he lives miserable, he dies miserable."

IN presenting the misery in life and death of the common G.I., whose story is essentially that of almost any footslogger in almost any army, the film never flinches. It is as unsparing in its realism as any straight-out documentary or newsreel. Unemotional, unsentimental, making its best points by irony and

Do You Know?
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IT WAS A BELIEF IN BOTH LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE THAT IF AN EXTRACTED TOOTH WAS NOT BURNT, THE OWNER, WHEN HE DIED, WOULD HAVE TO SEARCH FOR IT IN THE MOST TERRIFYING UNDERWORLD REGIONS!

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