

under-statement, it shows the face of war without one wave of a flag, one note of false heroics or jingoism, without a single trace of glamour; shows it as it is known to the great mass of those who take part in it but as it has seldom been shown before on the screen—as a dirty, wretched affair of rain, mud, heat, cold, hunger, weary marches, boredom, frustration, and fear. The raw recruits who look on death for the first time in Tunisia become hardened, bitter, fighting men as the campaign advances; each time the correspondent catches up with Company C he notices the gaps in the ranks of those he knew, gaps that have been filled again by raw recruits who in turn become tough, grim, unshaven fighters. Almost the only decency in life left to them to experience is their developing comradeship. And so it goes on, up to and finally past Cassino where the infantry have been held up so long, crouching in the mud under fire from the monastery heights.

SOMETIMES, as when they drop wearily to rest in a shattered Italian town, the men of Company C have the grey anonymity of the stones against which they lean. But we get to know them also as individuals—the Captain, a tough sentimentalist who holds his men together and wins their affection, and whose death in battle ends the story; the Sergeant whose sole desire, apart from killing Germans, is to find a phonograph on which to be able to hear the record of his child's voice that has been sent to him, and who goes mad when he does hear it; Private Don-daro, obsessed by thoughts of women; and several others, all sharing the same discomforts but too tired and too familiar with one another's company to bother any longer to share ideas. Each man is shut up inside himself, thoughts have become fixations and conversation is an effort.

In fact, some of the sequences of *G.I. Joe*, with the men stagnating in the slush under Cassino, remind one strongly of *Journey's End*. But often there is swift, crashing, purely cinematic action; and one incident, when two of the U.S. infantry play a merciless game of hide-and-seek with a brace of German snipers among the ruins of an Italian church, is likely, I think, to become one of the classic sequences of the screen because of its terrific tension and its superb attention to detail.

The Story of G.I. Joe is a piece of brilliant reporting by a man who was a master of his craft (Ernie Pyle supervised the production and guaranteed its authenticity). But it is, of course, very much more than just a stark record of events. Taking his cue from Pyle, the director has given the film a point of view, so that one watches it not merely with absorbed interest, but also with pity and anguish, and above all with admiration and wonder at the capacity for endurance of the common soldier.

PORTRAIT OF MARIA

(M-G-M International)

THIS, by all that's wonderful, is that Mexican production *Maria Cantelaria*, which was noted in these pages recently as having won high praise, and an award, at the International Cinema Festival at Cannes this year. An obvious item for the connoisseur's "must see" list, it will also, I think, have fairly wide general appeal.

Portrait of Maria is the tragic story of a Mexican-Indian girl, a peasant of

Xochimilco, hounded to her death by ill-fortune, ignorance, and superstition. Her mother had been stoned by the peasants as "a woman of the streets" (sic) and Maria herself is an outcast simply because she is her mother's daughter. There is a man who loves her and risks the hatred of his community to protect her; there is a priest who comforts her and an artist from the city who befriends her; but nothing goes well for Maria. Elemental forces are at work; her end is predestined, and the story moves with the inevitability of a Greek tragedy towards the climax in which the natives, believing that Maria has allowed herself to be painted in the nude, put her to death for her shamelessness.

This story is told with great pictorial beauty and a natural simplicity right outside the Hollywood convention. The camerawork is magnificent: the Mexican landscapes are superb in themselves and the players have been placed among them by someone with such a fine sense of composition that effects of true loveliness are frequently achieved. The acting, particularly of the two who portray the girl and her lover, has the same unaffected native charm, the same feeling for mood and place. As Maria, Dolores Del Rio seems here to be in her natural element; her beauty suits the part and she moves with the easy grace of the larger cats. All that is wrong with the film is its dialogue. The original language has been replaced, through the process known as "dubbing," by English speech, and the effect is curiously and disappointingly banal. It is not that the lip movements fail to synchronise with the words: it is rather that the words and the very timbre of the voices uttering them are out of harmony with the mood of the story.

IN the supporting programme was a *March of Time* item on modern Mexico which served, in a rather unusual way, to underline and illuminate the social and political content of *Portrait of Maria*. Yes, you can't get away from social content even in a film like this. The villain who lusts after Maria and, unsuccessful, eggs the villagers on to destroy her, is the local landowner and exploiter of the peasants' labour, a wretch whose nasty anti-social behaviour is as sharply defined as that of any bourgeois capitalist "menace" in any Soviet silent film. He is, in fact, almost illogical in his villainy. Nobody, not even a child—or an illiterate Mexican—could possibly fail to recognise him for what he is. On the other hand, there is a priest in the story and he is treated as a kindly and sympathetic character. And this attitude of the film, one gathered from the *March of Time* item, must correspond to the present political set-up of Mexico, a country which is basically Socialist but not anti-clerical.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

THE pantomime performed by the children of the Waterloo School and produced by Nurse Bissett, of the Waterloo Dental Clinic, was filmed at the National Film Studio at Miramar and is an item in the weekly review released throughout New Zealand on December 27. "Children's Pantomime" is something quite new in educational entertainment. It deals with the importance of dental health in a way that appeals to the young mind, while affording splendid entertainment for older people. The other item on the reel is "Rodeo at Tangiteroria."



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