

THE EPIC OF ARNHEM

THEIRS IS THE GLORY

(Rank)

THIS is the story of the Battle of Arnhem—the desperate attempt of the British 1st Airborne Division in September, 1944, to seize and hold the northernmost of the lower Rhine bridgeheads for the advancing Second Army. Re-enacted by the survivors in the ruins of Arnhem itself a year after the battle, it is a good report of one of the British Army's finest hours.

In the course of six long years of war, in which courage was a necessity of survival and valour itself became a commonplace, it is doubtful if any action—save, perhaps, the defence of Stalingrad—excelled Arnhem in heroic proportions. The film makes frequent reference to the fact that the men of Arnhem were just ordinary men. Physically that was true enough. They had the same hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections and passions; they were subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means—and hurt by the same weapons—as millions of other men who came before and after them. But to say that they were ordinary men is carrying Anglo-Saxon understatement too far. They were not even ordinary soldiers in their selection and training, and the qualities of sustained courage and endurance which they showed in that one great action were superhuman.

And, indeed, it is in the portrayal of these qualities of endurance that the film excels. The conflict around the Arnhem bridge, originally planned as at most a two-day action, ebbed and flowed for no less than nine days (September 17-25), during which a division of infantrymen faced the concentrated fury of a desperate and skilful enemy. One by one, as the record graphically shows, the light anti-tank guns were knocked out and the attackers driven back from their objective. Bad weather at first prevented the R.A.F. from dropping supplies and reinforcements, and by the time the weather improved the dropping areas had come under German fire. In the civilian hospital at Arnhem, and in the cellars of friendly Dutch homes, the stream of gravely wounded men swelled hour by hour. The fit and the lightly wounded fought on outside from slit-trenches or the more dubious security of shattered houses—Sten carbines and Piats against 88 mm. guns and Tiger tanks.

By the ninth day, the advance guard of the Second Army had fought through to the west bank of the river Lek, but the Arnhem bridgehead had been lost and the survivors of the 1st Airborne Division were ordered to retire. In a masterly night withdrawal which might have come straight from the training manuals (white tapes and all), two thousand reached the British front line, most of them ferried across the river by engineers and American paratroopers. Behind them they left six thousand of their comrades. It was a tactical defeat, but spiritually defeat was swallowed up in victory.

Fine as this reconstruction of a gallant action is, however, it left me unsatisfied, and though at times I was deeply moved

BAROMETER

Fair to Fine: "Theirs is the Glory."
Overcast, with bright intervals:
"Battle for Music."

I was troubled by the feeling that I had not been stirred as profoundly as I should. There were, I think, three possible reasons for this. First, the picture of the battle is a confused one. It appears as a succession of bitter and bloody encounters between small groups—and of course, that is just how most battles appear to those who see them from ground level. But some higher vantage point is necessary if the non-combatant is to get the general action into perspective. *Desert Victory* and *The True Glory* were in this respect better edited and presented. In the second place, the enemy against whom the men of Arnhem fought so long and so tenaciously is seen only in the form of tanks and artillery. A solitary sentry and a couple of tiny figures in the distance are the only Germans I can remember seeing in the entire film. But I fear that it was for a more subtle (and illogical) reason that I was left unsatisfied. Had this been the story of Serbia Pass, of Crete, of Bel Hamed, or of Sidi Rezegh it would, I think, have aroused in me the exultation and the anguish that such hopeless gallantry deserves. But the story of Arnhem belongs to the people of Britain. However much we might like to share in it, theirs and not ours is the glory.

BATTLE FOR MUSIC

(British National)

IN spite of a number of technical defects, some trivial and some serious, *Battle for Music* is a film I was glad to see and hear. It is an attempt, on the whole praiseworthy, to present in dramatic form the story of the London Philharmonic Orchestra during the war years. At the outset of the war the orchestra was in danger of dissolution through the liquidation of the proprietary company. To prevent this catastrophe the members themselves formed a new company and their struggle towards solvency is the story of the film.

It was a long and often desperate struggle—more of a campaign, in fact, than a battle. The first adventure was a tour of the provinces which roused a good deal of enthusiasm but barely covered travelling expenses. A tour of France which would have done much to establish the new company on a sound financial basis was brought to naught by the fall of France itself. Almost the last straw was the loss of many instruments in the bombing of Queen's Hall during the London blitz. More than counterbalancing these disasters, however, was the enthusiasm and determination of the players themselves, the willing help they received from leading conductors, and the very practical assistance they got from J. B. Priestley and Jack Hylton.

From the initial adversities to the final success the story is one well worth telling. But I wish it had been better told. The direction is uninspired and the photography often monotonous. In the early sequences the sound is marred by a persistent echo, and the dialogue is

at times woefully artificial. And those members of the orchestra who have parts to play in the story are so painfully conscious of the camera and the microphone that they recite their lines instead of speaking them.

But (and you have this not simply as my own untutored opinion, for I took along my friend Mus. Bac. as technical adviser) the music is superb, and even the occasional weakness of the recording cannot spoil it. I should mention that in the final sequence of the film—recorded in the orchestra's new home, the Orpheum Theatre—the sound is first class.

Nor is the music presented in the tantalising fragments to which we have become accustomed. There are lengthy excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* and Mozart's 40th Symphony. Eileen Joyce is heard in the finale of the Grieg Concerto, with Warwick Braithwaite conducting, and Sir Adrian Boult conducts Elgar's *Cockaigne* Overture. Sir Malcolm Sargent and the orchestra are heard in part of the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—while the adjoining building burns during an air-raid. In another sequence Benno Moiseiwitsch plays a movement from Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, the conductor this time being Constant Lambert. I found it particularly interesting to compare and contrast the styles of the four conductors—and not unamusing either, at times.

Battle for Music could be roundly criticised, and I have no doubt that it will be in some quarters, but I would not like to be guilty of dissuading anyone from seeing it. Its virtues win through over its faults.

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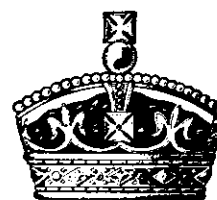
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