

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

FLIGHT COMMAND

(M.G.M.)

WHEN Howard Hughes made *Hell's Angels* 10 years ago, he set a standard in air films which looked at the time as if it could never be surpassed. I saw a revival of the Hughes production a year or so back, however, and I cannot imagine that the task of outdoing it would present any great difficulty to a producer these days. By this I do not suggest that *Flight Command* sets out to rival *Hell's Angels*, but it is at its best while it is in the air. When it hits the tarmac it lands with a solid bump and cruises leisurely round and about the aerodrome until called upon to take the air again. The story is stereotyped, but made interesting by the stars, Ruth Hussey (remember her in *Philadelphia Story*?), Walter Pidgeon, Robert Taylor, et al. I confess that I have no particular admiration for Mr. Taylor the actor, but here he has a *Yank at Oxford* type of part, and he makes quite a good job of it. He is shown as a young pilot fresh out from training school at Pensacola, who is ordered to join a celebrated squadron, "The Hell Cats," flying them a new 'plane. He crashes the 'plane in a fog, makes the acquaintance of his chief's wife without knowing who she is, and so bungles his arrival as to create a generally bad impression among his new companions. However, he manages to make himself popular with them and also with the captain's wife. Their friendship proceeds apace till it reaches a stage where, to coin a phrase, it begins to ripen into something deeper than friendship. Frightened at this prospect, she leaves her husband, thus exposing "Pensacola" in the accusing eyes of the "Hellcats." Denying any knowledge of what has happened, he nevertheless resigns, but first has to go on air exercises at sea, where he redeems himself by rescuing his chief, whose wife returns immediately and proves his innocence.

As all this unfolded, I had an uneasy suspicion that I had seen it somewhere before—and more than once. I forgot that, though, whenever the aeroplanes took off—they are the real stars of the picture, which is only right, since it was made with a view to speeding up recruiting for the American Air Force.

MODEL WIFE

(Universal)

IF you and your wife worked for the same firm of costumiers to save money for a baby fund, and the boss's attractive son made love to your wife, and your wife couldn't tell him she was married because there was a House Rule that no female employees were to possess husbands—I ask you, what would you do? This is the situation faced by Dick Powell, who possessed, or hoped he possessed, the *Model Wife*. Caught totally unprepared by Lee Bowman's blitzkrieg against his wife's none-too-secure defences, he embarks on a policy

of patient opportunism. The opportunity does not arrive, however, until Joan Blondell, the lady in question, has demonstrated the firm's underwear and her own figure to an admiring circle, until her husband has lost his job and almost his home, has gambled away the baby fund and threatened to go to China. Then, almost by the touch of a magic wand, Lucile Watson, the hard-bitten employer, learns the whole story, becomes a sweet sentimental old darling in the best Hollywood tradition, and reunites the fond couple.

That is a sketch of the plot—almost as ideal as the wife, certainly unrealistic, and not always convincing in its metamorphoses of character. Yet it is an intriguing story, told with a quiet and homely sense of humour—quiet because it is mostly conveyed by unimportant little incidents, homely because the atmosphere is that of a not-too-luxurious New York apartment. There is indeed one supremely comic scene that is alone worth the price of admission—the sequence in which Dick Powell acts as Lee Bowman's mirror-reflection. An old gag but a good one.

The lack of conviction in the story and polish in the direction prevent me giving *Model Wife* a handclap, but she, her husband, and her would-be husband, provide interesting entertainment.

SAILORS THREE

(B.E.F.)

IF the direction had been better and if Tommy Trinder, in making his film debut, had been really funny instead of relying too much on mere smartness, *Sailors Three* would be fairly good topical farce. It may be purely personal prejudice on my part, but I have never been able to regard as essentially comic anyone who, to raise a laugh, has to rely mainly on the obtuseness of an offside. In other words, I like my funny men to be the cause of wit (or humour) in others, as well as being witty (or humorous) in themselves. And by that standard, Tommy Trinder is not the comedian which the advertisements make him out to be.

On the other hand, Claude Hulbert is, and if it hadn't been for the less-advertised Mr. Hulbert I am sure that the film would have been, if not a dull at least a very ordinary show. That it does not, indeed, rise above second grade entertainment is due less to deficiencies in the plot than to the fact that Hulbert is subordinated to Trinder in the cast.

The story is a wildly improbable one about three intoxicated but indomitable British sailors who, returning from shore leave in South America, blunder by a series of mischances on to a German pocket battleship lying some way off the coast. Though, minus their uniforms, they protest that they are benevolent neutrals, the secret is out when Hulbert is discovered to have a large portrait of

Nelson tattooed on his chest and an even larger Union Jack on his back.

Through what can only be described as criminal negligence on the part of the enemy, these three irresponsibles manage to seize the ship, when most of the crew are ashore on a lonely island, and in due course take it to port as prize.

Except in the earlier part, however, the quality of the humour does not quite match up with the ludicrous nature of the situation, and the ending—almost a parody on the Ajax home-coming, with medals and newsreel effects complete—would have been much better left out. With these reservations, *Sailors Three* was not unamusing, and I will be watching for Claude Hulbert's next appearance.

THE BIG BOSS

(Columbia)



YOU'LL just have to imagine our little friend on the left here giving a big snob.

CLARK GABLE appears in a beard in one scene of "Comrade X." This is the first time in his screen career that he has worn a beard. When he was going to do so in "Parnell," an outcry from fans made him compromise on side whiskers.



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