

# ... THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED

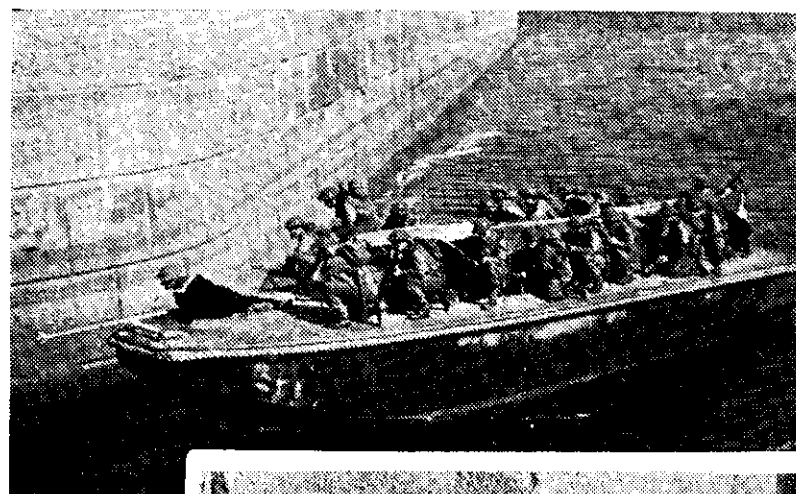
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and the story shows what careless talk does to a commando raid against a German submarine base in Occupied France. The objective of the raid is, of course, kept a close secret from the British troops being trained to carry it out. But a few soldiers let slip apparently harmless information. One young officer tells his girl friend, a strip-tease artist, that he is being moved away for special training, and the fact gets to the ears of German Intelligence through their spies in Britain. Another young British soldier tells his girl something: even he doesn't know what it means, but the Germans do. This is perhaps the most arresting feature of the whole story; that not a single British soldier *knowingly* gives away vital information, but when the scattered pieces of the jig-saw puzzle are eventually fitted together by the Germans the pattern of the raid is complete. So, when the attack is launched, the essential element of surprise has been lost, and though the British partly succeed in their objective, casualties are needlessly heavy.

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AN English critic has argued that films of this type, ignoring the conventional romantic values of the cinema, may in time have a profound effect on picturegoing tastes. This is an interesting viewpoint, which I could not, however, accept without qualification. After all, as even the few scenes on these pages indicate, *The Next of Kin* doesn't completely ignore the Boy-Meets-Girl theme, while as a spy story it is the Mata Hari of them all. I should be more inclined to argue that films of this particular Don't-Talk type, if duplicated overmuch, might have a rather far-reaching and not wholly desirable effect on everyday life. For the moral of *The Next of Kin* is not merely that you should not give away vital information: it is almost that you should not talk about anything at all, since you never know what may be vital information nor who may be listening. In wartime, security is a first consideration, naturally, and *The Next of Kin* is a powerful weapon to guard that security. At the same time, the community can only function on a basis of mutual trust, and as I remarked (not altogether flippantly) at the beginning, this film is so successful in its propaganda that its tendency is to encourage you not merely to keep your mouth shut but to look askance at your neighbour. And the mere fact that Hollywood panders so profitably to our spy-hunting instincts would suggest that human nature doesn't need much encouraging along those lines. Where, if you like, does Security cease and Spy-Mania and Melodrama begin? So, while I stand up to applaud *The Next of Kin*, I shudder to think what a whole series of equally potent films on this theme might do to us. We'd soon hardly dare even to tell anybody that our potatoes are coming up nicely, thank you, for fear that this might have some dangerous significance to the enemy.

—G.M.



Because people here gossiped, the Germans in France are prepared when British commando troops land to destroy a submarine base. One of the raid's objectives is achieved when sappers blow up the dock gates (right), but having lost the element of surprise, the British suffer very heavy casualties



AFTER THE RAID: "The next of kin of casualties have been informed"



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