


SPEAKING CANDIDLY


BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON

(Paramount)

 MALAYA is the country that lies beyond the very blue technicolour horizon. Malaya in the days before The Fall. To this pre-Japanese paradise Dorothy Lamour returns with an entourage consisting of a very sun-bronzed young man in a leopard skin, an American scientist, and a very blonde young woman in a solar topee, all bent on proving that Dorothy, who was reared in the jungle by a Swimming Tiger, is really an American millionheiress. As comic relief they take along a circus clown, a mischievous monkey, and a song entitled "A Full Moon and an Empty Heart." The chief hazards encountered by these Five Frightened People are treacherous natives and a very mad elephant, but as a Lamour fan of long standing I must say I found such experiences rather disappointing. As for Miss Lamour herself, there is nothing new to record, except that her sarong this time indubitably consists of one of my wife's tea-waggon covers.

ONE OF OUR AIRCRAFT IS MISSING

(B.E.F.)


 SOME readers may recall that when I criticised *49th Parallel* for having back-fired as propaganda by encouraging audiences to feel sympathetic toward the six Nazis who were trying to escape from Canada, I suggested that from the propaganda angle it would have been much better if the story had dealt with six British soldiers, sailors, or airmen trying to escape from Europe. This idea must have occurred to the producers of *49th Parallel*, for in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* they depict the adventures of six members of an R.A.F. bomber crew who land by parachute in Holland when their engines give out following a raid on Stuttgart. This time, of course, my old favourite, the psychological law of sympathy for the hunted, is in full operation in favour of the airmen; and there is an additional difference from *49th Parallel* in that the people of Holland are actively friendly and that the British party wins through.

Otherwise, the general structure of the two films is almost identical. There is a series of episodes in which the R.A.F. men move from place to place in Holland, eventually reach the coast, put to sea, and are picked up by a British ship. In this film, however, the initiative is almost all with the Dutch, who organise the escape, pass the flyers on from one group of patriots to the next, and take the lead in outwitting the German army of occupation. The British characters remain curiously impersonal—almost, one might say, "un-heroic"—and this in spite of the fact that one of them is Eric Portman, who dominated *49th Parallel* with his portrayal of boundless resourcefulness and energy as the leader of the Nazi party.

As a result, most of the interest of the film, to my mind, is centred on the good people of Holland who, with the exception of one Quisling, are shown to be united against the Germans and full of clever dodges of passive resistance. Two particularly good Dutch types are a young school-mistress (Pamela Brown), and an older woman (Googie Withers), who has ingratiated herself with the invaders in order to fight them, but not a single character in the story is developed fully enough to be more than a cameo. This fact, together with the episodic nature of the action, and the fact that some of the dialogue seems hard to follow, creates a feeling of shapelessness and of vagueness of purpose about the whole film. At the same time, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* is still good entertainment as well as good propaganda.

HIGH SIERRA

(Warner Bros.)

 WHEN, in the CBS session, *Any Questions?* the other Sunday evening a question suggesting anti-Semitism came before the panel, one of the speakers indignantly exclaimed that it was the kind of thing that should be jumped on with both feet. *High Sierra* produced the same reaction in me. I am well aware that the film critic's concern is with the entertainment value of a picture, but there are times when one is forced, willy-nilly, to take a moral view, and this is one of them. The theme of *High Sierra*—the glorification of the American gangster—is a rotten one, and why a studio like Warner Bros., which has gained some reputation for crusading, should waste time, and film, and good players on it, is a mystery.

True, there is a crime-does-not-pay twist in the plot. The killer is finally and irrevocably killed. But he does not die like a rat in a hole, or a thug in a slum basement, or get a similarly appropriate curtain. He dies in good clean sunshine, with his back to the ultimate precipices of the High Sierras, holding a battalion of State police and sheriff's deputies at bay, and within two hundred yards of a radio truck which is broadcasting a shot-by-shot commentary on a coast-to-coast hook-up.

As for the main theme, that there is honour among thieves and that the tougher and more ruthless a killer is the more chivalry and generosity there will be concealed behind his flinty features, that just will not go down any more.

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