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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

WAKE ISLAND

(Paramount)

THIS film account of how a handful of U.S. Marines and some civilian workers held Wake Island for a fortnight, in December, 1941, against massed Japanese attacks, is almost as remarkable (and as praiseworthy) for what Hollywood has left out as for what Hollywood has put in. There are no blondes in the bomb-racks; there is not even a solitary nurse, pretty or plain, on Wake Island—indeed, apart from one brief glimpse of men being farewelled at Pearl Harbour, there's not a sign of a skirt in the whole picture. The defenders of Wake Island do not hop into shell-holes every now and then in order to deliver brief discourses on democracy: when they do take cover, it is usually to save their skins for as long as possible and to curse the Japs.

Wake Island is actually closer to a documentary than to an ordinary feature. There is, naturally, some dramatic license, and just a trace here and there of unconvincingly pompous dialogue, as for instance when one of the Americans talks about their duty "to destroy destruction." Again, there is perhaps too much of a tendency to suggest that all the Japanese in the attacking planes are cowards: once or twice might have been all right, but every single time a daring American plane goes for them the Jap. pilots throw frightened glances over their shoulders and duck for safety. There is also a Flagg-and-Quirt quality about the friendly bickering between two of the characters (Albert Dekker and Robert Preston), though in this case it is quite likely, I imagine, that two real-life Marines would actually behave like that. And it certainly is amusing. I mean, how is anyone to say to what extent two such famous Hollywood Leathernecks as Corporal Flagg and Top-Sergeant Quirt may have influenced thousands of real Marines?

Still, that's philosophy, and there isn't much room for philosophy in Wake Island. Not when, on the same Sunday as the attack on Pearl Harbour the Japs come over this strip of sand in the Pacific and proceed to blast it yard by yard. In that first raid, the defenders lose a large quantity of their equipment and installations, all their planes, except a few that are in the air at the time. But for 14 days they fight back, against bombing from the air and pounding from the sea, and finally against a combined assault by sea, air, and land; holding their fire until enemy destroyers and transports have been lured inshore within range of the few American five-inch guns; sending up their surviving planes in suicide sallies; and then at the last, when their ammunition is almost exhausted, the garrison almost annihilated, and the Japanese are swarming ashore, flashing that last defiant message to the world, "The enemy has landed. The issue is still in doubt." Being history, the issue, of course, is never in doubt for the audience from the moment the picture begins, any more than it could have been in doubt for the real defenders of the island. They were a doomed battalion, but their dramatised resistance

has all the interest, all the excitement and all the emotional power of any fight against long odds. And Paramount, by sticking to the facts as far as they are known, by treating the heroes of Wake Island as men and not gods, and by using such capable actors as Brian Donlevy, Albert Dekker, Robert Preston, Walter Abel and MacDonald Carey to portray them, have risen to the occasion. They rose to it much better than some members of the audience who, I noted, showed a disgusting tendency to laugh at some of the most horrible scenes of destruction.

If you were to divide into two sections all the films about this war which we have so far seen—those dealing with war's impact on the domestic front and those concerned with purely military exploits—and if you were to place Mrs. Miniver at the head of one section, then I think you would place Wake Island at the head of the other.

MISS ANNIE ROONEY

(United Artists)

IN which Miss Shirley Temple appears in what the advertisements call her first grown-up role, quotes Romeo and Juliet, gazes at the stars, makes members of the audience feel either indulgent or a little sick, and does her best to lug along a cast as dull as yesterday's scones and a story as improbable as the discovery of six pairs of new silk stockings that your wife didn't know she had.

It's really too bad. They don't give this bright young creature a chance. They used to give her stories (and dances, and songs) that were, at the least, entertaining; and once they gave her Victor McLaglen as leading man (though once—or was it twice?—they gave her John Boles!) Nowadays, they make her either a Poor Little Rich Girl who can't make contact with the dear poor folk, or a Rich Little Poor Girl (whose wealth is in her sunny disposition), who can't make contact with the desirable rich folk; they don't bother to let her sing; and they only let her use her feet to jitterbug.

Pretty? Yes, Miss Shirley Temple is still pretty; she's still dimpled; and she still gives me the idea that we'll be seeing her and liking seeing her, for a good many years to come.

This particular dish offers us the Rooneys, grandfather, father, and daughter, as a happy family above whom the spectre of penury waggles a warning finger. Father Rooney has soaked up all grandfather Rooney's savings in hare-brained schemes—"It wasn't a hare-brained scheme. How was I to know the gold mine would spring a leak and let in the seas?"—and now he has a stoopendous, a revolutionary, a sure-fire fortune-making idea, but grandpop just can't agree that there might be a chance of milking rubber from seaweed. . . and only just in the last 99th foot a slight mistake in the chemical formula turns a stinking mess into a miraculous rubber substitute, recalls the furniture-removers from the very pavement, and presents Miss Annie Rooney and her beau with the chance to hold hands some more and quote Romeo and Juliet some more.

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