

THE DAY WILL DAWN

(Gaumont-British)

WITH the approval of the Admiralty and the help of the Norwegian Government, says the introduction of *The Day Will Dawn*, "this film was made in the faith that those who batter down the prison gates from without will find brave allies among the prisoners within." The prison gates, in this particular case, are in Norway; and the batterers are the Royal Navy and the R.A.F. helped by an Ascot racing reporter (a member of the aristocracy, according to his fellow-workers), suddenly turned foreign correspondent for his London paper; and the brave allies within the gates are Norwegian fisher folk and villagers, who fearfully and with great care defy the occupying Nazis.

Ralph Richardson, Hugh Williams, Deborah Kerr, with Harold French directing, make parts of *The Day Will Dawn* a moving and memorable account of danger and suffering; but now and again something slips and the faked, the staged, the rehearsed speech or action is thrust too blatantly before the long-suffering viewer of propaganda films. When that happens, I wish fervently I were looking at a stark documentary without benefit of central love-story,

particularised heroism, or carefully-worded script. For instance, Ralph Richardson in a London pub, delivering the more or less set speech about all being in it now, fighting for our own freedom as well as the freedom of all peace-loving peoples. Who could do it better? Who could wave such a convincing pipe? Very, very good, Mr. Richardson. But what about that pub audience of stuffed dummies holding handles at just such an angle, opening mouths just so wide, and eyes glazing with just that traditional look of the Dawn of Patriotism?

Surely we can expect a London pub scene to look cosier than a corner of Madame Tussaud's. I'll bet it wasn't beer or Scotch they were drinking anyway. Water, you may be sure; nice, safe, rehearsed water.

Deborah Kerr, frightened daughter of a Norwegian fiord steamer captain, knowing much and suspecting more about Nazi activities in the village; Hugh Williams, reporter, becoming aware, just too late for his comfort, of the danger about him; and a few villagers who know very much too much about the U-boat activity — these are the actors who do their best, and a pretty good best, with the difficult story in their hands.

No one in the audience wanted them to be shot by the Nazi firing squad at dawn; but everyone seemed to be as

astonished as I was when the Navy suddenly arrived, unheralded by even one shot from those strong Nazis, unloaded in orderly columns at the wharf, took all the Nazis prisoner (except the two who shot each other), released the hero and heroine, and set off for England, speeded by the happy waving of the villagers.

Well, that's war at dawn in one camera's eye.

Babies on a Battleship

IN my review of *Stand By For Action* (August 27), I described as "overdone" the episode in which two babies are born on a battleship. A correspondent (J.W., Wellington), writes to say that she remembers having read that the whole episode of mothers and babies on a naval ship actually did happen on a British destroyer earlier in this war.

This correspondent goes on to say that, while she always enjoys these notes and appreciates that a critic's job is to criticise, she imagines that I go fresh to my job and "rarely after a pouring wet, trying day coping with two small, fed-up boys." In her own case, she says, her one night off a week is "often thankfully and restfully spent at a light, reasonably good, cheerful, but un-deep picture (e.g., *To the Shores of Tripoli*)." So she asks whether our little man could perhaps cross his knees for this brand of picture as a special sign for people like her!

It's not an unreasonable request, but the little man (who, by the way, has four children), feels that if he started crossing his legs for one section of picturegoers, he'd soon be asked to stand on his head for another, or blow his nose and wiggle his ears for a third, and would end by getting completely tied in knots.

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