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TURNING ANZACS INTO SCREEN ACTORS

HARRY WATT, British film director, who is shortly going to Australia to make a film about Australia at war, tells here some of the elementary rules which helped him turn ordinary servicemen into actors in his films "Target for To-night" and "Nine Men." In Australia, too, he hopes to use ordinary servicemen without previous acting experience, for many parts in his coming film.

THIS article might equally well have been called "turning a film director into an Anzac." By that I don't mean that I have suddenly lost all loyalty towards my native Scotland—far from it. But now that I'm coming to Australia to make a film for Michael Balcon on Australians at war, I realise that my first job is to try and assimilate the spirit of Australia, in particular the spirit of the Australian soldiers.

A film unit in many ways resembles a cricket or football team. The director is the captain, the actors are the players. In order for the team to work well, the director must know his players; know their weaknesses, their strong points and their individual aspirations. Similarly, the team must know their captain. That is why I consider my first step towards making a successful film in Australia is to get to know the friends (I say "friends" purposely) with whom I'll be working.

Directors Have Lost Their Divinity

The days when a film director existed as a minor god, whose every wish was ungrudgingly accepted as the obvious thing are past. Not so much because film directors have suddenly become mild, patient people who are prepared to "coddle" actors rather than risk hurting their feelings, but because there is no alternative. Imagine a cricket team trying to play a decent match when the captain is constantly telling each player that he should have learnt more about cricket before entering this or that team, or that he doesn't know how to bat. No, it wouldn't work out. Neither does it work when you're making a film. A good film is produced only when there is all round co-operation; from the director's side as well as from the actor's.

The second point is how to turn inexperienced men into good actors. A soldier, for instance, who has never before been filmed—he may not even have seen a film being shot—how can he become a star actor?

The answer is simple enough. He doesn't "act" at being a soldier; he *is* a soldier. By long training and experience he knows just what a soldier would do in any given situation. He doesn't have to trouble himself with the question "How would a real soldier play his part?" He simply goes ahead and does it. In this way, the effect can be even better than if professional actors were used. I say "can," for that is where the director comes in.

The director "leads" the story. He pieces together—first in his own mind, later on paper, the hundreds of small camera shots that eventually make up the complete story. Also he decides just when and how the soldier will be photographed.

"For the Fun of It"

To take an example. When I first started in the film business I used to specialise in short documentary films. Fishermen at work, a day on the London Underground, shopping in London, or something similar. Together with a couple of cameramen, a camera, and a few "gadgets" we would set up in the centre of a busy thoroughfare, on an underground station or before a shop. People would crowd about, out of sheer curiosity. As soon as some suitable types had collected, I'd say to them: "Would you like to take part in a film? We aren't paying anything: it's just for the fun of it." Well, usually several people would step forward, and we'd get to work. I'd ask them to walk past the camera. Then the trouble would start.

(continued on next page)

★ Disney Tries Something New ★

WALT DISNEY has branched out in a new direction by making a coloured cartoon feature based on the book "Victory Through Air Power," by Major A. de Seversky. Just how Disney's whimsical fancy will cope with such grim realities as mass bombing of cities we won't know till the films gets here in the New Year.

Our photograph shows Major de Seversky, who was an ace Russian pilot last war and is now an American citizen and a leading aircraft designer.

