

Rommel After Alamein

THE DESERT FOX

(20th Century-Fox)

THERE must be, at a rough estimate, several thousand old acquaintances of Rommel in this part of the world, and a substantial number of them will, I suppose, be interested to discover what Hollywood, with the help of Brigadier Desmond Young, has to say about him. If they remember the reports which reached us of this film's première in London (complete with protests and picket-lines) their first reaction may well be to wonder what the flap was about—or, more precisely, what half the flap was about.

It is true that the film (Henry Hathaway directing) has the same faults as Brigadier Young's biography—a little too much hero-worshipping, and much too much special pleading for the German generals and field-m Marshals—but I don't think any reasonable person could say that it holds up British arms, or the British soldier, to ridicule or contempt. Indeed, the impression I got was quite the reverse. Certainly, in a supernumerary prologue (the real prologue is a brief and vigorous reconstruction of the famous Commando raid on Rommel's headquarters), a number of British prisoners—among them Desmond Young in person—are shown taking undignified cover from their own gunfire. No doubt it's funny to see a brigadier diving head-first into a slit trench, but no sensible person would think it ridiculous, in the circumstances. Then, too, Rommel (James Mason) has a jibe at the expense of Montgomery's cautious tactics in consolidation—but you can find more ill-tempered (and perhaps more ill-founded) criticism of Montgomery in the memoirs of his wartime colleagues. Though the film has hardly been made from what you might call the British point of view, there is nothing in it that should offend one's patriotic sensibilities.

I have one serious complaint to make—there isn't nearly enough of the clash between Afrika Korps and Eighth Army in the production, not nearly enough desert, none of the elastic-band, stretch-and-snap lunges eastward and westward. We get a glimpse of Rommel in retreat, with some cuts from the noisier sequences of *Desert Victory* to add verisimilitude, but from then on the story shifts to the undercover plotting and leads from that to the Army's attempted assassination of Hitler and Rommel's forced suicide.

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Desert Fox."
OVERCAST: "Night Into Morning."
OVERCAST: "Lorna Doone."

The film manages to convey pretty well the tension of this somewhat murky episode but since the story is tied to the ordinary haphazard course of events it lacks the steady drive and development that manipulation of material can give to a fictional narrative. There are, however, some exciting passages—notably that showing the attempt on Hitler's life—and much good acting. Rommel is Mason's best role since he went to Hollywood, and he does pretty well with it, but I was more interested in some of the minor players—Cedric Hardwicke, for example, whose portrayal of Strohm, Mayor of Stuttgart, is a subtle blend of fine words and foxiness (I kept thinking of Herr Adenauer); and Aduard Franz who has a small but telling part as von Stauffenberg. The most astonishing performance, however, is that of Luther Adler as Hitler. At first, it looks like caricature, then you wonder if it is not closer to the truth than you had imagined.

NIGHT INTO MORNING

(M.G.M.)

THIS production has a pleasantly photographed and deceptively cheerful opening sequence showing a small boy hopping and skipping along a leafy suburban street; then tragedy closes in. Ray Milland, a college professor, loses his wife and son when their home is burned down, and from this depressing incident the story never really recovers—though it purports to explain how Mr. Milland did. Alcohol is the professor's anodyne, and as a portrayer of alcoholics, Mr. Milland is probably in a class by himself. But this time he is obviously acting. Diluted by alcoholism, the tragedy degenerates into maudlin tears and sentiment, and I was glad when it was all over. Jean Hagen (ex *Asphalt Jungle*) contributes one small clear detail to an otherwise smudgy canvas.

LORNA DOONE

(Columbia)

THE only version of *Lorna Doone* I ever read was an abridgment "for school use," that came out in Herbert Strang's Library a good many years ago, but even that had a lot more blood and thunder in it than this pallid (if Technicolored) "free adaptation." The domain of the Doones has been enlarged to New World proportions—Doone Castle itself reduces Windsor to the proportions of a pillbox, and the falls on the Bagworthy Water look like the lower leap at Yosemite. The Doones themselves, however, are correspondingly diminished. Only Sir Ensor looked the part, and when he died the match was as good as over, though strictly speaking it was then (as you might say) one Doone and two to go.



JAMES MASON as Rommel

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 18, 1952.

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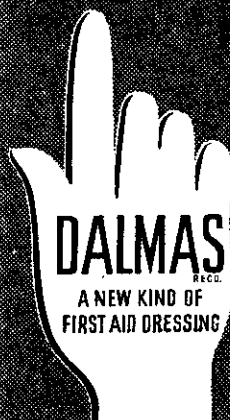
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