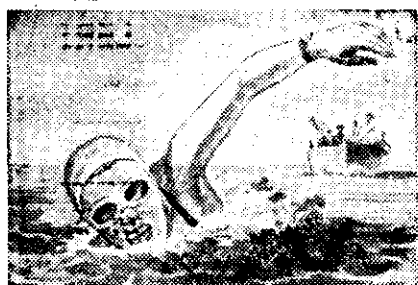


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FILM REVIEWS, BY F.A.J.

Under the Sea, up in the Clouds

THE FROGMEN

(20th Century-Fox)

ANY sort of story, I suppose, would be good enough as a vehicle for a subject as interesting in itself as the activities of Underwater Demolition Teams in the recent war, and I imagine no one burnt the midnight oil over the plot of *The Frogmen*. It's quite credible, but not exactly inspired. However, that doesn't matter much if you like this sort of thing, for the sequences which show the frogmen in action make the film.

The opening scene shows one of the Underwater Demolition Teams on a ship at sea. The amateur artist of the team is drawing a picture of their late commander, posted missing after a mission, which they propose to send to his wife. Their new commander (Richard Widmark) is evidently far from being the great guy his predecessor was, and his attitude soon leads to a request from every member of the team for transfer. Though they persist in this even after he has shown his courage by voluntarily rendering harmless a torpedo which has struck the ship without exploding, they come round in the end when he returns wounded from an underwater fight with a Japanese, after taking the lion's share of danger in blowing up some submarine pens.

The film (directed by Lloyd Bacon, with Norbert Brodine behind the cameras) acknowledges help from the U.S. Defence Department and the U.S. Navy, so one can suppose that in the three underwater missions which come into the story it gives a faithful picture of the work of frogmen. These missions are full of suspense and the details are interesting. As for the shipboard drama, I couldn't take the torpedo very seriously. Whatever was to happen later, two of the stars weren't likely to be blown up half way through the film. I thought the underwater mission to the submarine pens, which came almost at the end, the film's highlight. Here the tension was real.

While the story of *The Frogmen* is ordinary and none of the acting above water anything to write home about, I think there is something to be said for the film's showing these obviously brave men as all too human (though there is surprisingly little death in it). Heroes who, on active service, don't hide their unwillingness to serve with their commander are probably nearer the truth than the self-controlled superman we've sometimes been served up. The same could be said of two lunatics (one of them acting leader of the team) who get out of the water to plant a welcome sign on a beach on which marines are about to make a landing, earning for one of them a bullet in the spine, and risking the lives of the rest of the team.

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Frogmen."

FINE: "Four Steps in the Clouds."

The film might have been marred in other ways, too. It contains, for instance, no women or mermaids.

FOUR STEPS IN THE CLOUDS

(E.N.I.C.)

PAOLO is just another harassed husband, who stumbles out of bed and can't switch off the alarm quickly enough, is nagged into putting on the baby's milk and never hears the last of it if he makes a noise. The light is still grey when, his coffee undrunk, he grabs his bag of samples and runs for the bus.

Four Steps in the Clouds is the story of how Paolo (in whose shoes Gino Cervi seems quite at home) is led off the chain by a country-born girl, Maria (Adriana Benetti), who is travelling on the same bus. Pregnant, deserted by her lover, Maria is going back home to face the terrible wrath of her peasant parents. When she asks him to go along, just for an hour or two, as her husband, the kind-hearted Paolo is unwilling but in the end agrees. The hour or two turn into two days, with a night under a haystack in between for the troubled and chivalrous stand-in. There is a great celebration, a humorous midnight conversation between Paolo and Maria's slightly bibulous grandfather, and a day of the joys of country life (conveyed in part through some quite exquisite photography) in which Paolo and Maria discover a warm friendship. Then the truth comes out. Having cleverly talked Maria's father all the way into forgiving the girl, Paolo goes back home—and the film ends, almost as it began, with a fallen pot lid shattering the peace of the cramped city apartment.

Directed by Alessandro Blasetti, this warm, delightful, well-made film is a nice blend of humour and pathos. And it includes, in a wild bus journey, started late because the driver has just become a father, and enlivened with wine and music, one of the most joyous pieces of cinema I have been lucky enough to see.



RICHARD WIDMARK
The lion's share of danger

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 25, 1952.