

# Film Record—by Gordon Mirams

Scenes from "Blockade":

Above, Henry Fonda and Madeleine Carroll, the stars. Left: Aftermath of an air raid.

Right: Fonda with Leo Carillo, who provides comic relief to the stark drama.



## "BLOCKADE"

### Hollywood Producer Dares The Dictators

["Blockade," Walter Wanger—United Artists. Directed by William Dieterle. Starring Madeleine Carroll, Henry Fonda. First release: Wellington, August 12.]



A Good Bet

THE most exciting thing I have seen on the screen for several months is a glimpse of a cargo of bread and a cow being landed from a dirty old tramp steamer.

Under normal circumstances there could hardly be anything more dully prosaic; but this particular scene acquires extraordinary romance and excitement as the climax of Walter Wanger's Spanish Civil War drama, "Blockade."

For weeks the seaport town of Castelmare has starved, ringed in by enemy forces on three sides, its only outlet being the sea. But in the sea there are submarines, whose mission it is to torpedo the food ships that try to run the blockade and bring new life to

the men, women and children of Castelmare. Hour after hour the wives and mothers wait in queues for the food that is not there. . . . With pinched faces they gaze out forlornly toward the sea from whence cometh their hope. . . . Babies wail piteously in their cradles. . . . In the churches there are prayers. . . . But there is no talk of submission to the enemy.

#### Relief At Last

AND then at last, on the horizon is seen the ugly hulk that is the most beautiful sight in the world to the starving people of Castelmare. Yet the crowd that lines the waterfront is silent, hardly daring to hope.

A periscope breaks the surface, a torpedo speeds to its target; and the food that was to feed hungry babies sinks slowly to feed the fishes.

If you have any imagination it is not hard to feel the emotional tension of these scenes. Nor is it hard to rejoice when it transpires that the torpedoed vessel was only an empty decoy, and the real food ship steams triumphantly into port.

That is why I say that the sight of a cargo of loaves and a cow being unloaded is the most exciting screen experience I have had for months.

German, Italian and Spanish Rebel agents issued warnings that something drastic might result if Wanger released "Blockade,"

his melodrama of the Spanish War. "I'm going to show it the way I filmed it," replied Wanger—the result is a film that makes some compromises, but in the main is a graphic screen attack on the bombing and starvation of civilians.

To be quite frank, I went to see "Blockade" expecting to be disappointed—and was very agreeably surprised. For overseas newspapers had told us about the international ruffle caused by a Hollywood producer daring to make a film which might be construed as criticising the Fascist conduct of the Spanish War. Immediately "Blockade" was completed, Walter Wanger began receiving the unwelcome attention of foreign embassies. He was warned that General Franco was in a position to secure the help of Mussolini and Hitler in making things hot for his pictures.

Defiantly Wanger replied: "I'm going to release this Spanish picture as it is, and if it's banned in Europe I'll have to take my loss."

#### Compromise

WHETHER he stuck firm to that resolution I don't know. There is no doubt that the war in "Blockade" is the Spanish war, but the town of Castelmare you will not find on any map. Nor could you conscientiously say that the uniforms and salutes of the soldier characters are recognisable as those of either party in the struggle. To this extent there is compromise. Yet although Castelmare is mentioned as being a Mediterranean port, it re-