Tuesday next: Frank Capra’s "LONG PANTS" (1927) with Harry Langdon; D.W. Griffith’s "The Curtain Pole" (1906); Lupino Lane in "Kontie of the Mounted" (1927) and a collection of nontalkie silent and early sound trailers

December 8 1934
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two Melodramas from 1933

"LOOKING FOR TROUBLE" (United Artists, 1933) Director: William Wellman Screenplay by Elmer Harris & Leonard Franklin from a story by J.A.Bren; Camera: James Van Trees; Editor: Peter Polich 7 reels
With Spencer Tracy, Constance Cummings, Jack Oakie, Arlene Judge, Judith Wood, Morgan Conway, Paul Harvey, Joe Sawyer, Franklyn Aldrich, Ed Piel, Helen Westley, Paul Porcasi, Claire Dodd, Bradley Page, Richard Tucker, Al Bridge, Robert Romans, Charles Lane, John Elliott, Stanley Blystone, Jason Robards, Bryant Washburn.

Although a surprisingly minor film for Wellman to be directing in '33, it should be remembered that in those days the important thing was to keep busy and to maintain a steady flow of product. So that the really versatile directors - Wellman, Curtiz, Dieterle - constantly found themselves shuttled back and forth between A and Bs, specials and programmers. "Looking for Trouble" is enjoyably typical of the breezy programmers of the period: it gets off to a fine start, maintains a snappy pace throughout, and neatly interweaves elements of comedy, melodrama, and gangster action. Jack Oakie quite steals the show, perfectly cast as the brash buddy, and cool and lovely Constance Cummings is as appealing as always. Just when the fairly formula plot seems about to reach its logical conclusion, somebody in the front office seems to have realized with alarm that the picture was running too short - so an entirely extraneous and additional sub-plot is added to give us an extra reel. But we're not complaining, since this brings in a remarkable earthquake sequence from left field. Having seen this footage in later years (and especially in Universal serials) as stock footage, I had always fondly assumed it to be silent Universal material - but no, it was quite obviously shot for this film. The matching-up is just too good for it to be stock, and the costumes and cars are strictly 1933. There are some differences in the qualitative style and texture of the camerawork, but this may well be the result of using more than one camera on the sequence. Actually, it's all confined to a couple of sets, and isn't exactly major spectacle, but it is big and elaborately rigged stuff, and it still seems odd to find it in a film of this size. It seems more than possible that it was all intended for quite a different film which may have been abandoned after some special effects rigging was done, and Wellman was therefore able to take advantage of a sequence which would normally have been beyond his budget. Whatever the reason, it makes an unexpected and spectacular finale.

Today, for an extra gimmick, they'll throw in Frank Sinatra or Sammy Davis in an unadvertised guest spot; thirty years ago they threw in earthquakes! Those were really the days!

Intermission

"THE ACE OF ACES" (Rko Radio, 1933) Director: J. Walter Ruben Screenplay by John Monk Saunders & H.W. Hammeman from Saunders' story "The Bird of Prey"; Assoc. Producer: Ninian C. Cooper; Music by Max Steiner; Camera: Henry Cronjager; editor: George Hively. 7 reels

Somewhat of a cross between "The Dawn Patrol" and "The Eagle And the Hawk". "The Ace of Aces" came late enough in the World War One aerial cycle started by "Wings" and "Hell's Angels" to be almost as standardized as a Western, with its alternating dog-fight episodes and simple "war is hell" philosophies. One thing is novelty is that normally stalwart and true blue Richard Dix goes into the name of a number of airmen and tells his girl friend (lovely Elizabeth Allan, beautifully photographed, and giving her usual sensitive performance) quite bluntly that he has only 48 hours leave and no time to waste in holding hands! Despite the pregnant fading, we can never quite believe it of our Richard Dix! For the rest, it's fine, vigorous filmistic stuff, not too fantastic (most of the crashes are cunningly done fakes) but certainly exciteing enough, and full of goggles, flying scarves, spitting machine-guns and all the manias and heroics that we've come to ten and expect in this kind of fare. Normally rather dull and prosaic ("Jade Head", "Secret Service"), director Reuben has given this one a great deal of verve and vitality.

Wm. K. Everson