Next week: "THE DAWN PATROL" (1938, Edmund Goulding) with Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, David Niven, Donald Crisp; plus two of the very best talkie 2-reelers with Charlie Chase: THE HECKLER and HIS BRIDAL FRIGHT.

Please note: next week's program will be held on Wednesday July 5th, and in room 2C.

June 27, 1967
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

FORGOTTEN COMMANDMENTS* (Paramount, 1932) Directed by Louis Gasnier and William Soborr; photographed by Karl Struss; scenario: James Bernard Nagan and Agnes Brand Leahy; 7 reels

The key interest in this film, and of course its raison d'être, is the lengthy condensation of the Biblical portion of DeMille's silent "The Ten Commandments". It's spectacular and impressive footage, though the orgies look like such fun that Moses does emerge as something of a spoil-sport (which he probably was, though doubtless well-intentioned). Somehow thought it doesn't have the sweep, gigantism and expertise that one expects, and Paramount's utilisation of it is rather uninspired too. Retention of the original titles, rewarding though they may be to hesitation, quite destroys the illusion that it is a Biblical tale being told by a priest. It's as though he had pulled out a 16mm movie projector as a visual aid, and the combination of titles and narration doesn't work. It's enjoyable, and the Red Sea disaster still impressive, but the utilisation of so much footage is arbitrary and patent an economy move. For the rest the film holds up quite surprisingly well, especially for one directed by Louis Perils of Palestine" Gasnier, who in later years made quite a speciality of directing stock footage. Nestly photographed and well paced, it dates hardly at all - except intellectually. (Some of the dialogue is a joy: "Occupation?" - "Sanovar maker!")

As an indictment of Communism as it was understood (or misunderstood) in 1932, it is naive, though well meaning. Communism seems to have been a convenient peg on which to hang both an expose film and the DeMille footage. But at that it is far less wild, and probably contains more basic truths, than the hysterical anti-Red films of the late 40's & 50's - "I Married a Communist", "The Red Menace" etc. And we must admit that Comrade Sari in brief lingerie is certainly a persuasive argument for conversion to the Red dogma. If only they didn't use the word "exposure" quite so frequently (it seems to be the only anti-Capitalist insult the Reds know!) and if only Gene Raymond weren't quite such a dunce. In fact, for an anti-Communist film, the script rather surprisingly puts all the brains and ethics on the side of the State, leaving democracy to the Church and the dimwits. Marguerite Churchill representing all the solid "old" virtues of faith & love, is quite overshadowed by Miss Maritza in that Red underwear.

"THE DOOMED BATTALION" (Universal, 1931; rel: 1932) Directed by Cyril Gardner, German version by Luis Trenker & Carl Harti; scenario by Trenker, Harti and Paul Perez; Camera: Charles Stumar; Sepp Allgheier; music: Guiseppe Becce; A Marcel Vandal-Charles DeLeo Production; 8 reels
With Luis Trenker, Talia Birell, Victor Varconi, Gustav von Seyffertitz, Albert Conti, Herman Bing, Henry Armetta, Gibson Gowland, C. Henry Gordon

Following the enormous and unexpected success of "The White Hell of Pitz Palu", Universal's Carl Laemmle, who had borrowed German leanings anyway, launched into a whole series of German co-productions, loosely termed as "mountain films", although with less of the mystic and symbolic qualities that marked the original "SOS Iceberg". "The Doomed Battalion" & "The Rebel" were all money-makers on their first release, and in addition provided stock footage for serials and B pictures for years to come. (The German version of "The Doomed Battalion" - "Berge in Flammen", also starred Trenker but had Lisay Arna and Luigi Serventlich in the Birell-Varconi roles). All of these films were vigorous adventure yarns, done so realistically that the few studio special effects, bellying more to the Frankenstein films (and even the exploding mountain) really stood out like more thumbs. "The Doomed Battalion" has a slightly more sober plot than others in the group, resembling some of the better Russian fictional war films of the 40s - as for example, "In The Rear of the Enemy". What plot there is in Trenker's favorite theme - two friends from opposite sides meet for the first time on a mountain, are united by their "understanding of its mystique, are split by events that make them temporary enemies, and then reunited once more on their beloved peak. Trenker had used this before, and used it again when he starred in and co-directed Korda's "The Challenge" (1939), developing with the conquest of the Matterhorn. The theme of the doomed troop is an old favorite in war films too - remember "The Road to Glory?" - but originality is of less importance here than werve and style. Pictorially it is splendid, and the ski scenes magnificently shot and edited. (It has been seven years since we played (separately) tonight's film; the Trenker print is a far better one than we had in 1960).

-------------------- William K. Everson --------------------