Maurice Elvey was one of Britain's most prolific and reliable directors, a veteran who made his first film in 1913, his last in 1957. (He died in 1967.) Never a great director, he naturally made no great films - but he tackled just about everything, literary classics, science fiction, comedies, musicals, big films and small. We've run a number of his films at the Huff, ranging from his silent "Donkey and Son" to such talkies as "Sally in our Alley", "Transatlantic Tunnel" and "Under Your Hat". Today's trio of Elvey films is in no way intended to represent his best or most typical work, but they all come from a single short 8-year span and undoubtedly have more interest if seen together.

"GROOPER TROUBLE" (Ministry of Information, 1940) Dir: Maurice Elvey Screenplay: J.O.C. Orton & Val Guest; Camera, Eric Cross; edited by Compton Bennett; one reel

We've run a number of these miniature dramatic or comedy reels from the Ministry of Information, all designed for wartime hard-sell propaganda, but with their "message" still seemingly diluted by the entertainment values supplied by top directors, writers, and stars. (Hitchcock and Ford worked on these films too, but alas we have never been able to get hold of their contributions.) We had announced a totally different title originally, only to find that we had been in error since it was directed by John Paddy Carstairs; hence this substitution. It's an amusing little short, due no little to Fred Emney, a very funny character comedian who was at his peak in the 30's. However, thanks to British radio and tv talk shows, he was rediscovered in the 60's and has become something of a "current" personality, often playing comedy cameo in such films as "The Italian Job" (where he was the British football fan complaining about the "bloody foreigners" monopolising the Italian sidewalks!)

"THE LODGER" (Julius Hagen-Twickenham Productions, 1932) Dir: Maurice Elvey Screenplay by Miles Mander and Paul Roth from the novel by Mrs Belloc Lowndes Camera: Sidney Blythe, Basil Emmott, William Laff; 6 reels

Although not released in the States until as late as 1935, by which time it must have seemed quite dated, and retitled "The Phantom Fiend", "The Lodger" garnered surprisingly good NY reviews, being rated quite one of the best of British films and a real thriller! Today its interest is primarily academic, which is why we have no qualms about playing such an inferior print -- a dupe with noisy and variable sound. Having close to the story-line and mood of Hitchcock's film, and with Novello repeating his original role, it's a fairly straightforward and non-frightening enough watch, not wanting to be accused of stealing Hitch's rather unique visuals -- such as the pacing feet photographed through a glass floor. The imposing archival-type foreword indicates that the film was at one time afforded archival respect; such is not the case, this title having been put on by a small-time Hollywood operator. I have retained it only because without it the print would have no main title.

"WHO GOES NEXT?" (Fox-British, 1938) Dir: Maurice Elvey Produced by Ivor Nealen; screenplay by David Evans from a story by Beagald Simpson, James Wedgwood Drewsell; additional dialogue by Lawrence Green; Camera: Ronald Neame; 8 reels

Probably the best film thus far turned out by Fox's hitherto not very distinguished British program, "Who Goes Next?" got good initial bookings and reviews, but then was almost totally forgotten. It doesn't even appear in the biographies of most of the players. The critical success of Novel's "La Grande Illusion" probably inspired Fox to try for a far more conventional and commercial film along vaguely parallel lines. Its triangle situation is both old-hat and far-fetched today, but the war scenes, if artificial, are interestingly photographed and staged, and Britain's own home-grown Stroehle - Heinhalt Haus - has a fine time as the audience favorite commandant. Barry K. Barnes was then on the threshold of being one of Britain's major new stars; the war interrupted his career and he never quite made it, but he made a few good films (notably "This Man is News"), was as good a villain as a hero, and provided a welcome breath of good looks and virility in Britain's rather unprepossessing arsenal of leading men.