Madonnas and Men (June, 1920) Directed by E.A. Rolfe; scenario by Edmund Goulding and Carey Wilson; Camera, A.A. Caldwell; 5 reels

"Madonnas and Men" is one of the first of that popular 20's cycle ("Man, Woman - Marriage", "The Ten Commandments", "Noah's Ark", "The Road to Yesterday") that drew parallels between contemporary life and that of a bygone historical era. But while most of them used a modern story that benefitted from a peep into the past, this one reverses the process. It starts out in ancient Rome, with Christian girls being sworn to the lions, and a title informs us -- without any historic footnote to back it up -- that "No civilization is permanent which is founded on the debasing of women". To prove his point, the old scothsayer spins a tale of the jazz age -- and the lessons learned, we return to Rome to apply it. Even in 1920, critics wondered if the solid production values and the many sensations compensated for the absurdity of it all, and logically and dramatically, none of it will stand still for too close a scrutiny. However, as an independent States Rights picture, it is much more elaborate -- and competent-than most. The cabaret scenes are delightful, and there doesn't seem to be any stock footage involved in the arena scenes. Leading lady Raye Dean is quite pretty -- if nothing else -- and Evan Burrows Fontaine, a noted dancer of the day, is given ample opportunity for abandoned dancing, both in the Arena and in the "Midnight Revels" cabaret, although her coy, behind-a-screen striptease, is rather confusingly intercut with a cabaret number and it is only later one realizes it wasn't part of the show! Director Rolfe seems to have had a singularly unspectacular career, with only a brace of productions of this type, and a Houdini serial, to his credit. It is 17 years since the Huff last showed this film; since we may not last through such a long span to allow for a later revival, this may well be its farewell appearance.

Leatherneck (Pathé, 1929) Directed by Howard Higgin; a Ralph Block production;
Story and scenario, Elliott Clawson; Camera, John Mescale; titles by John Krafft; editor, Doane Harrison; 5 reels

The best of several films made by the Block-Higgin-Boyd combination, this film -- though essentially a silent, did have talking sequences, though all such part-sound prints appear to have been lost. Like many films in that transient period, it was shunted aside in the shuffle. Apart from the framing court-martial scenes, it gives less indication of its hybrid quality than most films of its breed; the pace seldom slackens, the story is told in strong visuals rather than dialogue, and the camera is constantly mobile. The silent print is, however, shorter than the sound version. The Film Daily called it a surefire money-maker, and "the best Marine picture yet filmed - it has color, guts and action" - a strong summing-up, coming so soon after "Tell It To The Marines". The critic also commented on Boyd's fine speaking voice and added that Diane Ellis hummed pleasantly, although Photoplay considered her speaking voice quite poor. Although nominally a Flagg and Quirt type picture, "Leatherneck" is actually far more off-beat, with a dramatic opening clearly inspired by "Beau Geste", and throughout scenes (and locations) that remind one, perhaps intentionally, of great scenes in other movies -- from "The Love of Jeanne Ney" to "Greed". The plot is really strong meat, sets strong and elaborate, camera-work first-rate - and the villainy, in the hands of Fred Kohler, almost inspired! It's a good, enjoyable piece of lush melodrama, enhanced by a fine toned original print.

WNL. K. Everson