Although quite different in approach and intent, both of tonight’s films deal with defeats, debacles and miscalculations (on the British side) during World War Two, and they are unique in being virtually contemporary accounts.

NEXT OF KIN (Ealing, 1942) Directed by Thorold Dickinson; produced by Michael Balcon; screenplay by Dickinson, Basil Bartlett, Angus McPhail and John Brightton; Camera, Ernest Palmer; Music, William Walton. 7 reels.

Initially designed as a very rough training films for British troops, then reshaped for theatrical release because of its propagandist and informational values, "Next of Kin" was then sent to this country where it was further changed to fit US troop training needs, while a fourth version was put out theatrically by Universal. Thorold Dickinson repudiates all but the original version, and in fact when we first played the film (in August of 1960) he fervently asked us not to!

Our version is the U.S. Army one, with retention of some of the rough dialogue (by 1942 standards) denied the U.S. release edition. However, our print — seemingly a brand new and little used one — did have one cut made in it, physically, presumably for a specific showing. There are just two or three minutes missing in one place, signalled by the rather abrupt theatre interior scene where the young officer goes backstage. The scene started with a (very decorous) strip-tease on stage, and then showed the stripper coming back to her dressing room, where her dresser (Mary Clare) is shown to be a Nazi agent who keeps her under her control by catering to her drug habit. This is a fairly important point, since otherwise the stripper has no real motivation for turning traitor. This footage was retained in the US forces version, and in the last print that we showed. Dickinson was least happy with the Universal version, calling it a complete travesty of the original. This Army version, he says, was edited by a Selznick Studio cutter who wasn’t worried about censorship, but tried to trim the film of its shock value on the theory that it would be too grim for American troops as yet unversed in combat, and in addition would lower their respect for the apparently 5th-column ridden British people. The film’s initial English release was held up because of a forthcoming Commando raid, the film’s defeatist approach being considered bad for morale. Then when the raid was, militarily at least, a success, Churchill felt that the film would be easier to take and more of a propagandist tool if Dickinson would insert "more dead Germans". This was done, but now the War Department was unhappy since the sombre message they wanted to ram home had been weakened, so more changes were made, and a few seconds of exceptionally gruesome scenes removed. However, other than saying that "the guts were taken out" and the "climax was shortened"; Dickinson was never very specific about the deletions, and one must bear in mind that he had had singularly bad luck with his films at the hands of American editors — on "The Secret People" in particular, where the last 2¾ reels were removed in toto! — so his chagrin about this particular film may well have been colored by other experiences. It was hardly a popular film in England, since memories of the Dieppe raid (a military "success" but with a staggering casualty rate) were still too recent. Not only were hundreds of families personally affected, but it was a grim reminder that the time of the invasion was still a long way off. (At the time, many assumed that it was actually the start of the invasion). Yet for all the tampering and softening, "Next of Kin" is still
quite a grim and powerful film, and at the same time a rather entertaining one, with touches of comedy and irony that have more than a casual affinity to Hitchcock. Since everybody fears dentists, it was a sly touch to make one of the German agents a dentist, just as Hitchcock had done in "The Man Who Knew Too Much". And, as in "The Lady Vanishes" though for different and more serious reasons, the Number One spy escapes unscathed at the end.

Immediately following "Next of Kin" will be a contemporary British Paramount News, but a special edition prepared for showing in munitions and other war factories. It deals with the Dieppe raid, and somehow manages to be VERY positive, concealing the appalling casualty rate (surprisingly, since radio and newspaper accounts were quite truthful) and turning the whole affair into something of a triumph. As a propagandist adjunct to the feature, this newsreel is quite interesting and valuable.

--- Intermission ---

THEIRS IS THE GLORY (Rank- General Film Distributors) 9 reels
Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst

Although both a critical and a (reasonable) commercial success despite the antipathy to war films in the immediate post-war period, "Theirs is the Glory" is today virtually an unknown film. It was never released in the U.S., and though later included in a tv package, rarely shown because of its total lack of stars. Nor is it even listed in most reference books; neither documentary nor fiction, it was an unclassifiable kind of film, and since no credits were ever published, it fails to show up even in listings of credits for writers, cameramen, art directors etc.

The film's major value today - or at least its major interest - is as a contrast to the multi million-dollar and multi-star "A Bridge Too Far", dealing with the same ill-fated Arnhem campaign. Both films have their advantages, although the star-studded cast of the new film isn't necessarily one of them. The original film was made right after the event, on the actual locations and battlefield, and with most of the survivors - officers, men, civilians - taking part. Memory of the battle was still fresh in everyone's minds, and superficially it has tremendous accuracy. On the other hand, "A Bridge Too Far" has the benefit of a quarter of a century's perspective, and much greater knowledge of the logistics and planning of the battle. The second version is more aloof, more of a tactician's account, whereas the older film has far more of a sense of immediacy, as well as the sense of chaos and confusion that still surrounded the event less than a year afterwards. Pitting one against the other is pointless, and both have their strong points. Although "Theirs is the Glory" is technically a documentary, it is closer in spirit to those late-20's British films like "The Battle of the Falkner and Coronel Islands" and "Q Ships" which sought to recreate World War One actions. It's not a "studio" film - but its camerawork, its well-lit compositions and its well-staged action sequences all proclaim a studio craftsmanship which would be denied to the authentic documentary.

Wm. K. Everson