Piano Accompaniment for "Q Ships" arranged and played by STUART O'DERMAN.

"Q" SHIPS (New Era, 1928) Produced by Gordon Craig; Directed by Geoffrey Barkes and Michael Barringer; Screenplay by Michael Barringer; 65 mins.

With J.P. Kennedy, Roy Travers, Douglas Harold, Jack McEwan, Johnny Butt, Philip Howland, Charles Emerald, George Turner, Lionel d'Aragon, Alec Hurley, Terence O'Brien, Hugh Douglas, Earl Jaliooce, Harold Auten. (Val Gielgud is listed in some British sources; he is not in this print, but this is of the slightly shortened U.S. version so if he was in it, he may be a casualty of the U.S. editing).

Several years after World War Two, the British made a number of meticulous reconstructions of wartime (and primarily Naval) campaigns, with "Sink the Bismarck" and the Powell/Pressburger "Pursuit of the Graf Spee" being the best. But while these films certainly used documentarian techniques and restraints, they were essentially big commercial films with big (though well-selected) stars and, in most cases, a certain amount of fictional narrative interwoven. In the mid to late 20's however, the British had made a similar series of films (likewise concentrating on Naval campaigns) about World War One. Ostensibly documentaries, they dramatised rather than fictionalised the events depicted, intercut a great deal of authentic documentary footage, avoided stars (even well-known actors) and just utilised, where possible, individual personnel to re-enact their original roles in the war. The films (and "The Battle of the Falkner and Coronel Islands" is perhaps the best) were non-propagandist, but distinctly jingoistic, honest and respectful in dealing with the enemy, and perhaps not terribly exciting. But they did offer an interesting and sober appraisal of certain aspects of the war, and devoid of emotion and personal suffering, they were quite entertaining. "Q Ships" is one of the last of this series, although with the coming of sound there was a tentative attempt to carry on the tradition in a more fictional vein, via such films as Asquith's "Tell England", about the Gallipoli campaign. There's some excellent and well-used documentary footage in "Q Ships", and it perhaps has some added interest in that the story it tells was later used by John Ford in "The Sea Beyond!" (later remade as "The Enemy Below" and shifted to WW2) and to a lesser degree in "Submarine Patrol".

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THEIRS IS THE GLORY (Rank-General Film Distributors, 1945) Produced and Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst; 90 mins app.

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

The film's major interest today is perhaps as a contrast to the fairly recent multi-star and multi-million dollar "A Bridge Too Far", dealing with the same ill-fated Arnhem campaign, and based on Ryan's well-documented book. Both films have their advantages, although the star-studded cast of the later film definitely isn't one of them. (Incidentally, that film was in the news again last week with director Richard Attenborough suing promoter Joseph Levine for an accounting of profits!)

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 (it was one of the major disasters of the latter stage of the war) and superficially and emotionally it has considerable accuracy. On the other hand, "A Bridge Too Far" had 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 aura of chaos and confusion that still surrounded the event less than a year afterwards. Pitting one against the other is pointless, and for future war historians, both have their considerable values. Although technically a documentary, "T.I.G." is somehow closer in spirit to "Q Ships" and the other films in its cycle. It's not a "studio" film, but its staging, its camerawork, its well-lit compositions and the huge scope of its action sequences all proclaim a studio craftsmanship which would be denied to the authentic documentary. If it is a documentary, then it's almost certainly the most expensive one ever made!

William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10:25, followed by a discussion session.

Schedules for the Spring series will be available next week.

Post-script to "Q SHIPS": I might have mentioned that director Geoffrey Barkes was essentially a second-unit director of location sequences; he did most of the African location footage for the British "King Solomon's Mines". And Lieut. Commander Harold Auten, who plays himself in the film, wound up as a film distributor in New York, where he modestly called himself Captain Auten. He died only a few years ago.