Two Post-war thrillers on a theme of wartime guilt.

ROGUES' REGIMENT (Universal, 1948) Directed by Robert Florey; produced by Robert Buckner; screenplay by Buckner from an original story by Buckner and Robert Florey; Camera, Maury Gertsman; Music, Daniel Amphericarr; 68 m. With John Ford (White Oak), Toreen (Bill Maubert); Vincent Price (Mark Van Ratten); Stephen McNally (Martin Brunner); Edgar Barrier (Colonel Mauclaire); Henry Rowland (Erich Heindorf); Carol Thurston (Li-Ho-Kay); James Millican (Cobb); Richard Leo (Kao Fang); Philip Ahn (Tran Duy Glan); Richard Fraser (Rycroft); Otto Reichow (Stein); Kenny Washington (Sam Latcho); Dennis Lengate (O'Hara); Frank Conroy (Col. LeMercier); Martin Garralaga (Hazarat); James Dolan (American Colonel); Paul Bryar (Police Chief); Victor Sen Yung (Rickshaw boy); German SS recruit (John Doucette); Gordon Clark (Lt. Verdiir).

The post-war thriller of the tracking down of wartime criminals became, for the most part, a convenient adjunct to the private eye melodrama, very much personalised, with Dick Powell (in "Cornered"), Alan Ladd, Bogart, Ray Milland and others tracking down the killers of their buddies, brothers and wives. Relatively few, though, made the proper wartime-product "Shall We Escape?" and Welles' later "The Stranger", dealt with a collective guilt for which the individual villains were merely symbols. "Rogues' Regiment" is a particularly lively example of the latter, since Florey's direction and Powell's then new tough guy persona combined a serious theme with the more traditional action and photographic mood of the film noir thriller then at its peak.

Actually it is meant to suggest the story of Martin Bormann, third-highest ranking Nazi chief, and McNally's screen name was as close as they could get to the original -- which they could not use without looking foolish, since he was then, and still is, at large. Because of the impermanence of the times politically, since it is not only anti-Nazi but also anti-Communist, and makes ominous reference to the coming war in Vietnam. Though a much superior picture, in a way "Rogues' Regiment" also falls into the same economic category as "The Mark of Cain", shown a few weeks back. With a big new wartime created audience, and with tv not yet a threat, Hollywood was over-producing, and, assured of an audience, spending a lot of money on its films. Normally, "Rogues' Regiment" would not have been such a handsome production, even allowing for Florey's ability to make his films look more expensive than they were. Universal had so much product on its hands then that it didn't bother to release them all even in the countries where they had their own offices; in England for example, this film (along with "Letter from an Unknown Woman" and others) was sold off to a small independent distributor. Apart from its content, it's a very stylishly done and very enjoyable melodrama.

ACT OF VIOLENCE (MGM, 1948) Directed by Fred Zinneman; Produced by William H. Wright; screenplay by Robert L. Richards from a story by Collier Young; Camera, Robert Surtees; Music, Andre Previn; 82 mins.

With Van Heflin (Frank Enley); Robert Ryan (Joe Parkinson); Janet Leigh (Edith Enley); Mary Astor (Pat); Phyllis Thaxter (Ann Sturges); Berry Kroeger (Johnny); Nicholas Joy (Mr. Cavery); Harry Antrim (Fred Finney); Connie Gilchrist (Martha Finney); Will Wright (Pop); Phil Tead (clerk); Bill Phillips (Vetern); Dick Elliot (Fopous man); Ralph Peters (Tim, bartender); Dick Simmons (veteran); Don Haggerty (cpl); Roger Moore, Mahlon Hamilton (drunks); Dabid Newell (bystander); Rudolph Anders, Roland Varro, Andre Previn (German voices).

"Act of Violence" is one of the very few Hollywood films of the period to deal with individual American guilt in the preceding war, although in those days before the Vietnam war brought home more fully the pressures involved, it is perhaps a little intolerant in its equating weakness with guilt. As with its many anti-Communist films of the period, it is quite unforgiving and demands perhaps excessive atonement. Or it may be that Fred Zinneman (here directing his fifth feature, and on the verge of major prestige) who had earlier directed "The 7th Cross" which had been criticized for its sympathetic depiction of "good Nazis" under O. H. M. Harootian, was able to adapt the script which would not be repeated. A long time getting to the screen, it was initially planned as a much smaller film to star Howard Duff, then upgraded as a Mark Hellinger-Sezicken film that would co-star Gregory Peck and Bogart, and after two years wound up (probably for the best) as this MGM release. MGM, likewise over-producing, did it little with it as Universal did with "Rogues' Regiment". In England it was double-billed with "Force of Evil" and sold as a straight action program. Despite its serious theme, it also works very well as a film noir melodrama, interestingly progressing from sunlit morning scene (shot at night, as true noir always is) in sleazy underworld settings. Mary Astor is particularly effective and touching in these later episodes. The cast as a whole is interesting, though both the Heflin and Ryan roles are rather unsuitably written so that they can be manipulated to their predestined solutions. Both of tonight's films are solidly made and relatively unfamiliar; they should complement one another rather well.

--- William E. Everson ---

Program ends at 10:37 p.m. 15 minute discussion session follows.