REMINDER of a printing error in previous bulletins: Program #5, listed as being for March 10, will take place on March 17. There is no March 10 show.

THE NEW SCHOOL FILM SERIES 61: Program #3
February 24, 1959

Tonight's two films hardly represent major artistic works, but they're related in theme (tangents of World War One) and structure (melodrama built around a triangle). Both are from the same year, 1935, and both are thoroughly representative products of their respective studios. Taken in the right spirit we think you'll find them extremely entertaining.

THE LAST OUTPOST (Paramount, 1935) Directed by Louis Gasnier and Charles Barton; produced by E. Lloyd Sheldon; Camera, Theodore Sparkuhl; Screenplay by Philip MacDonald, Charles Brackett and Frank Partos from an original story by F. Brinten Austin; Dialogue directors, Max Marcin & H.C. Potter; 70 min. With: Gary Cooper (Michael Andrews); Claude Rains (John Stevenson); Gertrude Lawrence (Elena Turner); Kathleen Niblock (Ilya); Colin Tapley (Lieut. Prescott); Jameson Thomas (Quiller); Nan Grey (May Swopes); Rolf Wuth (Nicholaus); Billy Bevan (Corporal Foster); Nick Shaft (Haidar); Harry Secom (Amrak); Georges Renavent (Turkish Major); Akim Tamiroff (captured officer); Meyer Oukhoyr (Armenian patriarch); Claude King (General); William Brown (Sergeant Bates); Frank Lackteen (tribesman)

The practice of using stock footage for montages or on a bigger scale for "B" movies and serials was always fairly common, but Paramount quite shamelessly exploited the economic device in "A" movies as well, perhaps most spectacularly of all in their 1940 "Geronimo", which was nothing less than a melange of big action sequences from westerns by James Cruze, William K. Howard, Frank Lloyd, King Vidor and Cecil B de Mille, while the plot itself was a total washout of "Lives of a Bengal Lancer". "The Last Outpost", made in the mid-30's, not only developed itself by advertising itself as a major follow-up, but it also capitalised on the still popular romantic aura of World War One action adventures, and did it in the cheapest way possible - by borrowing huge chunks of footage from the Schoedsack-Cooker silents "Grass", "The Four Feathers" and "Chang", and from the early talkie "Rango". Its new "original" story, despite its rather threadbare triangle-romance hook, was cunning and inventive if not actually original in finding ways to introduce the action and shift locales from Kurdistan to the Sudan. (The Siamese jungle is passed off as part of the Sudan, just as ferocious Fuzzy-Wuzzies from "The Four Feathers" are simply renamed "Turkey warriors!"). Incredibly no reviewers at the spoted the deception, despite the fact that only two of the films involved were silent documentary classics, or perhaps they were persuaded to keep silent. The intercutting of new and old footage is slick and ingenious although the graininess of the old stock gives the game away, and dialogue is sometimes unintentionally funny. Insisting that the tribesmen can swim the Karum River because "they did it five years ago", Rains is a little off... it was actually ten years earlier, in "Grass", that they did it. Nevertheless, five important screen-writers and an interesting battery of veteran directors and newcomers (Louis Gasnier from the silent serials, H.C. Potter who would later direct Grant in "Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House") keep it all slick and lively, the Lone Pine (California) locations also making the outdoor scenes impressive. And note the curious billing - five stars all equally billed below the title, with Colin Tapley (whom Paramount never succeeded in building into a star, but kept busy for a decade in small roles) getting his name in the same size letters as Grant and Rains!

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

STORM AT DAYBREAK (MGM, 1933) Directed by Richard Boleslawsky; Screenplay by Bertram Millhauser from an original story by Sandor Hunyady, Camera, George Folsey; Music, William Axt; Assoc. Producer, Lucien Hubbard; 78 mins. With: Kay Francis (Irina); Walter Huston (Dushan); Nils Asther (Geza); Philip Holmes (Dashvily); Eugene Pallette (Janos); C.Henry Gordon (Pamto); Louise Closer Heln (Militza); Jean Parker (Danitza); Mischa Auer (assassin)

Perhaps at the start it should be re-emphasised that this is a 1933 film, not 52, as erroneously noted in our opening paragraph above. The pre-code morality plays as such were far more involved in the war effort and less arid in this earlier film. Whereas "The Last Outpost" was all action and no style, this film (from a more poetic sounding play called "Black Steamed Cherries") is all style punctuated by periodic action. Boleslawsky is erudite enough to get the Serbian names pronounced right and most of the wartime detail looking right. Visually it's a treat: sets, art direction, costuming, editing, cinematography; all make it a worthy looking at that the trite plotting hardly matters. (Francis & Huston do not have really great chemistry together either, as their earlier "The Virtuous Sin" proved). Like so many early MGMs, the craftsmanship is very much above the genre's average but the whole is lacking in terms of the story lines. Incidentally, although I saw the film only about a year ago, it wasn't received in time for a re-screening. My recollection is that the many crowd scenes are full of familiar names and faces (from Akim Tamiroff on up) not listed in the cast; lack of re-screening time prevented listing these, so those of you who care about such things will need a paper and notebook at the ready. Let it be added that C. Henry Gordon quite steals the whole show with his vicious and vindictive villainy.

-- William K. Everson
Program ends app. 10:20; discussion follows.