LANDFALL (Associated British Picture Corp.-Pathé, 1949) Directed by Kem
Antinak; Produced by Victor Skuzetsky; Screenplay by Talbot Jennings from
amiral's wife, Claire's (Wallis a Burne) from the novel (George Shute;
Camera, Wilkie Cooper; Aerial photography, Stanley Grant; Music, Philip
Green; released in the U.S.A. in 1955 by Stratford Pictures; 88 mins.
With: Michael Dennison (Rick); Patricia Plunkett (Mona Stevens); Kathleen
Harrison (Mrs Stevens); David Tomlinson (Binks); Joan Dowling (Miriam); A.E.
Matthews (Warden); Maurice Denham (W/C Hewitt); Dennis O'Hea (Capt. Burney);
Margaretta Scott (Mrs Burney); Saebastien Shaw (W/C Dickens); Nora Swinburne
(Admiral); Victor (Mr. Stevens); Laurence Harvey (P/O Hooper);
Paul Carpenter (P/O Morgan); Frederick Leister (Admiral); Hubert Gregg (L/C
Dale); Walter Hudd (Professor Legge); Margaret Barton (sister) Edith Sharpe
(Rick's mother); Teddy Foster and his band.

Although not a particularly good movie, "Landfall" is nevertheless
unlucky in having had obscurity thrust upon it all down the line. Had it been
made in wartime, its theme of personal conscience versus the greater issues of the
war might have made it a quite powerful film. Five years after the war
neither issue seemed very important to a British moviegoing public anxious to
forget the war and more concerned with when austerity living and rationing
would disappear. Seemingly aware of this, both writers and director apparently
regarded it as a property that real well as a novel but no longer would trans-
late interestingly into film, so handled it efficiently but as a routine
assignment. Its thunder was in any case stolen by the virtually simultaneous
release of "The Hasty Heart", the Warner-British production with Richard Todd
and Ronald Reagan that had a wartime background but was much more appealing as
a high-powered emotional hit. It was a huge success, and pushed "Landfall"
totally into the background. Its release was delayed by four years over here by
which time it seemed even more dated; it was shot down in flames by a very
special preview. It seemed that the distributors were "dismayed" that
this kind of British film had no market here. They were only handling it
reluctantly as a contractual obligation and were delighted to abandon all the
British films that needed a little help, concentrating only on those few like
"Last Holidays" which got top reviews and had proven boxoffice value.
"Landfall" disappeared quickly and quietly, and even on a later tv release got
little exposure. None of this is to suggest that it is a film suppressed and
needing of a major rediscovery. But it is a solid, respectable little film,
well acted (look out for Laurence Harvey in a small role, his third film) and
with some pleasing locations in rural Southern England. An ignored classic it
most certainly is not, but it does deserve a nod in passing, especially
considering the bad timing and bad luck that has dogged it so constantly.

THE PIED PIPER (20th Century Fox, 1942) Directed by Irving Pichel; Produced
by Nunnally Johnson; Screenplay by Nunnally Johnson from the novel by
Nevil Shute; Camera, Edward Cronjager; Music, Alfred Newman; NY premiere,
Roxy Theatre; 84 mins.

With Monty Woolley (Howard); Roddy McDowall (Ronnie); Anne Baxter (Nicole);
Otto Preminger (Major Diesen); J. Carroll Naish (Aristide Rougeron); Lester
Mathews (Mr. Cavanaugh); Jil Edmond (Mrs Cavanaugh); Ferike Boros (Msme);
Peggy Ann Garner (Shella); Merrill Todd (Villem); Maurice Tazin (Pierre);
Florence Eldridge (Remy)(Rougeron) (London);
Marcel Dalio (Focquet); Morton Lowry (Roger Dickinson); Marcelle Cordey (Mme.
Bonne); Odette Myrtil (Mme. Rougeron); Jean de Val (Railroad official);
Robert O. Davis (Lieutenant); Henry Rowland (Military policeman); Helmut
Dantine (Aide); George Davis (Barnman)

Although the trade press liked "The Pied Piper" and thought it a first-rate
film, they were guarded about its boxoffice prospects, predicting only
"moderate" success because of its lack of star names. Actually it turned
out to be a big surprise and a major commercial success, probably because of its
laid-back quality. Surrounded on all sides by high-pressure war films,
here was a gentle and leisurely film that made its propaganda points and
was certainly topical, yet was exciting, moving and even funny while keeping
the real horror of war in the background. Critics loved it, and because of its
basic good taste, had no excuse for the (unjustified) complaints that
they had levelled against Lubitsch's "To Be Or Not To Be" for using the war
as a background to comedy.

While obviously the film owes a lot of its success to the quality of Shute's
original novel (other Shute novels to be filmed were "A Town Like Alice","No
Highway" and "On the Beach") a great deal of the credit must go to its
director, Irving Pichel. Pichel was an excellent actor (especially as a
villain) with a rich, mellow voice that was frequently used by John Ford as
a voice actor, he brought to this film a lot of the same Steinbeckian nuance and
great skill. With the possible exception of "The Most Dangerous Game", none
of his films could be considered outstanding, but they all had a warm, human
quality and were characterised by especially adroit and sensitive handling

-over-
of actors. This is particularly apparent in Pichel's rather unique quintet of war films: "The Man I Married", "The Pied Piper", "The Moon is Down", "Happy Land" and "A Medal for Benny" - none of them combat films, all of them dealing with life under the occupation or on the home front. They're quiet, restrained (especially for the period) and perhaps even lacking a little showmanship. The climax in "The Pied Piper" isn't as exciting as it might be, and the fadeout scene is almost deliberately anti-climactic, yet it works extremely well.

Pichel's handling of actors is particularly interesting in the cases of Woolley and Preminger, both of them dynamic personalities. After years of playing bit roles, Woolley had suddenly hit it big as the star of "The Man Who Came to Dinner". "The Pied Piper", made immediately following that, clearly had to capitalise on the impact that Woolley had made in that film, yet at the same time tone him down so that the film didn't become just a Woolley vehicle. Both the actor and Pichel as director rise to the occasion beautifully in handling the role. One hesitates to think what would have happened if, for example, the film had been made just a few years later, in the wake of "Laura", when the role would almost certainly have been given to Clifton Webb! As for Preminger (also an actor/director), while it's great fun to see him give his definitive Nazi performance, complete with grimaces and the expected dialogue, it seems at first that he's going a little over the top considering the natural quality of the rest of the film. But to a degree, this is deliberate, both Preminger and Pichel neatly leading the audience up the garden path to pave the way for a surprise narrative twist. The rest of the cast performs well too, particularly Anne Baxter (at her best, always, in her pre-stardom years) and Roddy McDowall.

Like all Fox films of the period, it is well mounted even though not (nor does it need to be) a particularly "big" production. The combination of art direction and special effects, always two strong components as Fox, produce some interesting visuals. The shots of the refugees on the French roads have a slightly studio look to them but mainly because they are so glossy; out of context, they were later used in compilations and passed off as documentary footage, as were many of the Dunkirk scenes in Fox's "A Yank in the RAF" from the same period.

Although in no sense a "lost" film, "The Pied Piper" is somewhat of a forgotten one. I don't know when it last had any kind of a theatrical revival - certainly not since the very early 50's - and it seemed to vanish from tv long ago too. Because of this, prints are very hard to come by, and our copy tonight is not the pristine print we would like it to be. It's well-used, but complete, and eminently watchable. Needless to say, the print of "Landfall" - not a film that is going to be much in demand - is virtually pristine and almost virginal in its lack of splices and scratches. But that's always the way, alas.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends 10.42.
No discussion period tonight, but next week's program is quite short, so there'll be time for questions then.