FAIR WARNING (20th Century Fox, 1937) Directed by Norman Foster; Produced by Sol Wurtzel; Screenplay by Norman Foster from an original story by Philip Wylie; Camera, Sidney Wagner; Assistant Director, Aaron Rosenberg; 70 mins.
With E. Edgar Bromberg (Matthew Jericho); Betty Furness (Kay Farnham); John Payne (Jim Preston); Victor Kilian (Sam); Billy Baurd (Valcom Barkhardt); Gertrude Muir (Herbert Willett); Gloria Roy (Grace Hamilton); Ivan Lebedeff (Count Andre); John Eldredge (Dr. Galt); Julius Tannen (Mr. Taylor); Paul McVey (Mr. Barkhardt); Lehah Taylor (Mrs Barkhardt); Lydia Knott (Miss Willoughby).

20th Century Fox, like Paramount, maintained a high standard in their "WM" product; it was always elaborately produced, often unconventional, and frequently more satisfying than their far more formulized "A" product. I deliberately want to say very little about "Fair Warning" because it is virtually an unknown film; it had no NY first-run, even on the bottom half of a double bill, to my knowledge - though available - has had no TV exposure, and while it is hardly a rediscovered masterwork, at the same time it is always a pleasure to run across a little obscurity like this and to sit back and just be delighted with it. Written and directed by Norman Foster, a much better director than he was an actor, it looks as though it might have been intended as the first of a series with Bromberg as a pre-Columbo type of low-key and not very prepossessing investigator. Possibly as a series it might have worn out its welcome quickly, but as a one-shot, it is both intriguing and surprising. John Payne, still billed as John Howard Payne, is only the nominal leading man and seems to be there primarily so that he can be gotten into bashing trunks; child star (or actor, he was never really a star) Billy Baurd later became a prominent TV producer, and assistant director Rosenberg became a major producer at Universal. Bottom billed Lydia Knott was the mother of director Lambert Hillyer.

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UNDER TWO FLAGS (20th Century Fox, 1936) Directed by Frank Lloyd; Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; Associate Producer, Raymond Griffith; Screenplay by W.P. Lipscomb and Walter Ferris from the novel by Ouida; 2nd unit direction and staging of battle scenes, Otto Brower; Musical Direction, Louis Silvers; Camera, Ernest Palmer and Sidney Wagner; NY premiere, Radio City Music Hall, May 1936; 105 mins.
With Ronald Colman (Sgt. Victor); Claudette Colbert (Cigarette); Victor McLaglen (Major Doyle); Rosalind Russell (Lady Venata); Gregory Ratoff (Ivan); Nigel Bruce (Captain Menzies); C. Henry Gordon (Leut. Pataine); Herbert Mundin (Rake); John Carradine (Cafard); Lumans Hare (Lord Seraph); J. Edgar Bromberg (Colonel Fercel); Onslow Stevens (Sidi-Ben Youssef); Fritz Leiber (French Governor); Thomas Beck (Pierre); William Ricciardi (Cigarette's father); Frank Reicher (French General); Francis McDonald (Hussun); Harry Semels (Sgt. Malines); Nicholas Goussin (Pierre); Douglas Gerrard (Col. Farley); Frank Lackteen (Sheik Hamadu); and Hans Schum, Marc Lawrence, Jack Pennick, Philo McCallough, Karl Hackett, Georges Regas.

We have wanted to play "Under Two Flags" for a long while, but have held off pending the availability of the full original 105 minute print, as opposed to the 95 minute reissue and television version. We finally have it, though it must be stressed that this is an old original print, with the requisite number of splatters for a print of its years. Also, in fairness, it must be admitted that the trimming of a real did little real damage. Oddly enough, the cutting was betrayed only by the total disappearance of John Carradine, though his name remained quite high in the cast. Yet he only has one quick scene (of which he makes his customary most) and had Fox left it alone, there would have been no other obvious evidence of editing. Curiously, one aspect cut always thought to have been due to the reissue re-editing proves to be equally abrupt in the full version. In the midst of the climactic battle, during a lull in the fighting, not only does McLaglen manage to get his men into the fort, but Colman, in a burmose, has been cut scouting. It's not a jarring cut, but since everything else is fairly leisurely, one must assume that originally there was more exposition there. Possibly there was too much, interrupting the momentum of the climactic action, and that one cut restored the pace.

The thrice-filmed "Under Two Flags" is more than a casual blood-brother to the thrice-filmed "Beau Geste" (I'm ignoring the later lampoon which would give it the edge by one version). "Beau Geste" had better dramatic structure but had essentially the same motivation and action content. The relationship is further underlined by the fact that Colman and McLaglen played in the silent "Beau Geste" as well as in this "Under Two Flags". Frank Lloyd has always seemed to be a much over-rated director (whose good films owed more to script and performance than to him, viz "Mutiny on the Bounty" and "Cavalade") who usually got less out of his material than most other directors of comparable stature would. "Eagle of the Sea" and "Wells Fargo" were notably dull and disappointing films. "Under Two Flags" does come off well, but one wonders how much of the credit is really Lloyd's? Colman is superbly Colman all the way, every line, every pause, every gesture a Colman "special" - and it works. The script captures the flavor of the now somewhat outdatated romantic adventure novel perfectly. And Otto Brower's staging of the climactic action is flawless, the groupings of riders and overall construction of the episode making it look even more spectacular than it really is. The stunt falls are excitingly done, and there is evidence of the old "Running "RM" horse-tripping device which would eventually be discarded.

Continued overleaf
"Under Two Flags" is glorious, typical mid-30's adventure hokum. (How well I remember the excitement it caused it 1936, especially in my age-group!) The larger than life dialogue, the artificial but obviously expensive sets, the oddly-assorted French accents, the type-casting, the soaring use of "Pale Hands I Loved" during the love scenes, everything works to make this the kind of "Big" picture that we all took for granted in the 30's. One can quibble at the obviousness of the faked riding closeups or the use of a treadmill, but somehow even that was indicative of the Hollywood presence and we didn't really mind. There are too echoes and foreshadowings of other films: one can readily see how some bright young writer transferred the Cigarette role to the same studio's "Suee" a couple of years later for Annabella (who was at one time at least considered for the role in this film) and of course Dietrich's Frenchie in "Destry Rides Again" is yet another derivation. But what matter! It pretends to be nothing more than expensive hokum and as such comes off beautifully, starting right in with some elaborate title effects and returning to them for the close.

Surprisingly, considering her French background, Colbert's accent is somewhat erratic, and she did not get reviews that could be considered among her better ones. Nevertheless, in the presumably permanent absence of Theda Bara's Cigarette, Colbert's must be considered the definitive one. The much-waunted Priscilla Dean version proved to be a sad letdown, but as a film and as a performance.

When all is said and done, the one real drawback to the Foreign Legion adventure is the restriction of action. Obviously all one can do is have the Arabs attack the fort for the climax, and maybe torture a captured legionnaire or two en route. If one is lucky - as here - there is an Oxford-scented Sheik villain to provide some colorful repartee. But there are none of the opportunities for variety of action or terrain that the Western offers. However, "Under Two Flags" so often overlaps into "Fort Apache", "What Price Glory?" and "The Lost Patrol" territory that one can't help wondering what Ford or Walsh might have done with it. They would probably have cut down right away on the Rosalind Russell role (even though she only comes into it at the half-way mark, virtually repeating her "China Seas" role of that same year). However, it's good to have it back on a big screen again -- and to have John Carradine back with it.

-- William K. Everson --

Program finishes approx. 10:45.
Since this is the last show of the season, there will be a brief question/discussion period afterwards. I'll try to shave a little time from the introduction to give us a little extra time at the end.

Since the Summer Bulletins are available in the lobby, and our Summer program is outlined in detail on page 52, there is no need to give an abbreviated version here. Please note that the Summer program will take place at the 66 5th Avenue screening room just around the corner. It is also just possible that the first program in the Fall will take place there too; I'll say more about that this evening, and of course more details will be given in the last program notes of the Summer series.