

The 19th British Silent Film Festival



Thurs 14 Sept 4.45pm

SUSPENSE (1930)

Introduced by Geoff Brown



Director/Producer: Walter Summers

Screenplay: Walter Summers

From the play by: Patrick MacGill

Photography: Theodor Sparkuhl, Hal Young

Editors: Walter Stokvis, under the supervision of Emile de Ruelle

Art director: John Mead

Sound recordists: Dallas Bower, G. R. Dagg

Sound system: RCA Photophone

Studio: British International Pictures, Elstree

Shooting: February–April 1930

Running time: 79 minutes

Cast: Jack Raine (Captain Wilson), Cyril McLaglen (Sergeant McGlusky), Syd Crossley (Corporal Brown), D. Hay Petrie ("Scruffy"), Mickey Brantford (Private Reginald Pettigrew), Percy Parsons (Private Brett ("Alleluia")), Fred Groves (Private Lomax)

Kinematograph Weekly, 3 April 1930, p.28, P. L. Mannock;

"Outside on the BIP lot, some 400 yards of British and German frontline trenches have honeycombed the vast field. I found Walter Summers alert but handicapped in his progress on the footage of Patrick MacGill's *Suspense*. A network of cables, like mammoth spaghetti, littered the No Man's Land between studio and camera, and the clay of Hertfordshire clung gratefully. A

telephone system between the dug-out entrance and the distant recording box was not very reliable. The sun went behind a cloud.

"That's nothing," said Fred Groves, almost unrecognizable in khaki and goggles. "You wait," said Cyril McLaglen, who seems to enjoy mud. Beside me were 'effects' for bombardment – a bass drum, a Salvation Army drum, and an *1812 Overture* drum.

Rehearsal proceeded. Mickey Brantford arrived with two German privates as prisoners, and was challenged by the sentry. The sun emerged, and the auxiliary arc lights in the trench spluttered.

"Ready!" Then a sudden impatient oath. "Those damned skylarks again. Wait a minute." Summers signaled on the trench top with a flag. Afar off appeared three men with rook rifles. Overhead a paean of twittering broke out from a dozen skylarks, all eloquent of the joy of spring sunshine.

The guns fired and the larks retreated, scared, only to return as the scene was about to be reshot. "The trouble is," explained the recording expert, "that they don't record properly. The noise sounds like tearing tripe over the microphone. So we have to shoo them off every time we shoot, and they keep on coming back."

Variety, 23 July 1930, p. 31, Chap.:

"As a war play, *Suspense* flopped in London, although the critics generally rated it very high. Reason for its quick death was generally attributed to its outspokenness and that it was too strong for London taste. The talker version, as far as it goes, is a good piece of work. The problem is whether it represents entertainment in the ordinary sense. MacGill's original, even after licked by the censor, was pretty raw. In the talker it's been watered down to an occasional "ruddy", with a snatch of a naughty song . . .

The war scenes are well done, although never attempting the terrific force of *All Quiet*. Within their bounds they are intensely realistic and at times pictorially attractive. Military detail is well done, although Walter Summers, who is a good producer as British studios go, makes the usual mistake of letting his actors smoke in the front line trenches. Acting of an all-male cast is good. Jack Raine is the best as the captain. Mickey Brantford is effective as the rookie who goes mad with shell shock. Cyril McLaglen, brother of a guy named Victor, is raw and rough as the sergeant.

Dialog has been stripped of the poetic values MacGill's original contained, and the whittling-down of the shell-shock sequences take away from the drama the atmosphere of futility and the anti-war propaganda with which it was filled.

Suspense should do pretty well here with the better neighbourhood audiences, but it doesn't look like material for the States."

Film Weekly, 1 Nov 1930, p. 25:

"*Suspense* lives up to its title, for it is this element that grips you throughout a sequence of small incidents which combine to produce an almost overwhelming impression of brooding danger and pent-up fear. This vivid war picture places you in a dug-out with a party of men who have to wait, wait while beneath them they can hear the steady tap-tap-tap of the German miners.

Each reacts to this menace according to his character. The young recruit breaks under the strain and rails against war in a fit of insanity. An old stager blasphemes hysterically. Scruffy, the Cockney, knits a sock and philosophises after the fashion of his kind about women and life.

Walter Summers, the director, with the aid of an excellent cast, has built up realism and suspense and made a picture gripping and powerful, if not too pleasant. The best performances come from Cyril McLaglen as the sergeant, Mickey Brantford as the private, Jack Raine as the officer, and D. Hay Petrie as Scruffy." *Programme note compiled by Geoff Brown*



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