

# 'Yanks' cast underscores tension in 1942 England

By Pete Schmitz

Understandably, it is not difficult for the serious movie-goer to develop a disdain for popular romances since many of them have sacrificed a challenging content and an intelligent dialogue for easy entertainment. And after seeing World War II exploited for this purpose erous times on the late show and recently in *Hanover Street*, one may be wary of John Schlesinger's newest release called *Yanks*. But don't pass it up, because this is one of the best films to come out this year.

The story which opens in 1942, deals with three English women and their newfound lovers from the American Army who are stationed in their village as they wait to invade the European continent.

## movie review

The three affairs are not only pleasant to follow, but they also brilliantly underscore the various levels of political tension which were prevalent between England and the United States at the start of the war. Furthermore, credit must be given to the cast who add to the calibre of the script.

Most appealing are Vanessa Redgrave and William Devane, as Helen and John. Helen is an aristocratic-musician and Red Cross volunteer who finds temporary fulfillment with John, a lonely commanding officer who also has an unsatisfying marriage. In order to realize the potential of their friendship, Helen abandons her society's long established notions on duties and responsibilities. As she comes to terms with her new perspective she decides to let her son leave the prep school where all the males in her husband's family have gone for the past few generations.

**THROUGH JOHN'S HELP** Helen and her son are able to escape the constraints of tradition and pride, two characteristics which were excessively embodied in English culture. But Redgrave also helps Devane to look underneath his protective exterior which has been shaped and hardened by the American philosophy of rugged individualism. Although the two cannot express their love to each other beyond the short time they are together, they have affected each other for a lifetime, as the best of friends do.

Also good are Wendy Morgan and Chuck Vennera, as the happy-go-lucky lower class twosome who have no trouble falling in love. Although not enough time was spent with their characters since the director was pre-occupied with alliance growing out of conflict, their roles nevertheless add an entertaining dimension to this drama.

Most of the attention is given to Matthew, a sergeant who runs the cafeteria, and Jean, a shop clerk living and working with her parents. Their liaison is complicated by Jean's fiance (who is killed later on but not in a convenient fashion to rubberstamp the current affair), and parents who are initially scornful of and threatened by Americans. Richard Gere (who was excellent in *Looking For Mr. Goodbar* and *Days of Heaven*), and Lisa Eichhorn

are also excellent in their parts, which are more difficult given the sometimes sappy and ambiguous material they have to work through.

**ALTHOUGH LOVE** is the main flavor for this fare, their are other elements which makes *Yanks* a memorable picture. One of them is the attention given to racism in the Army, as we see the blacks being given the worst food and beatings for appearing at the New Year's Eve Party.

And it is in this sequence only where the writers provide the audience with instances of heroic deeds. This time, for a change, the acts of heroism are done by the females who defy their bigoted escorts and dance with the black soldiers after they were brutally harassed by the white soldiers.

Some may criticize this movie for making World War II look too much like a Boy Scout campout instead of a real war. But Schlesinger (who is known for doing heavy material like *Midnight Cowboy* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*) is more interested in entertaining us by presenting love as a metaphor of politics. His efforts at this have been more than worthwhile; and I suggest that students take their parents to see *Yanks* during Thanksgiving vacation.

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