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The Searchers (V'VISION—COLOR)

Western in grand scale with John Wayne starring and John Ford directing. Good boxoffice potential despite deficiencies in story.

Warner Bros. release of C. V. Whitney production (Merion C. Cooper, executive producer). Stars John Wayne. Features Jeffrey Hunter, Vera Miles, Ward Bond, and Natalie Wood. Directed by John Ford. Screenplay, Frank Nugent; camera (VistaVision Technicolor), Winton C. Hoch; editor, Jack Murray; music, Max Steiner; song, "The Searchers," Stan Jones. Previewed in N.Y., March 2, '56. Running time, 119 MINS.

Ethan Edwards	John Wayne
Martin Pawley	Jeffrey Hunter
Laure Jorgensen	Vera Miles
Capt. Rev. S. Clayton	Ward Bond
Debbie Edwards (No. 2)	Natalie Wood
Lars Jorgensen	John Qualen
Mrs. Jorgensen	Olive Carey
Chief Scar	Henry Brandon
Charlie McCorry	Ken Curtis
Brad Jorgensen	Harry Carey Jr.
Emilio Figueroa	Antonio Moreno
Mose Harper	Hank Worden
Debbie Edwards (No. 1)	Lana Wood
Aaron Edwards	Walter Coy
Martha Edwards	Dorothy Jordan
Lucy Edwards	Pippa Scott
El Greenhill	Pat Wayne
Look	Beulah Archuleta

The boxoffice appeal of John Wayne combined with the imprint of John Ford makes "The Searchers" a contender for the big money stakes. It's a western in the grand scale—handsomely mounted and in the tradition of "Shane." The VistaVision-Technicolor photographic excursion through the southwest—presenting in bold and colorful outline the arid country and areas of buttes and giant rock formations—is eyefilling and impressive.

Yet "The Searchers" is somewhat disappointing. There is a feeling that it could have been so much more. Overlong and repetitious at 119 minutes there are subtleties in the basically simple story that are not adequately explained. There are, however, some fine vignettes of frontier life in the early southwest and a realistic presentation of the difficulties faced by the settlers in carving out a homestead in dangerous Indian country.

First C. V. Whitney picture for Warner Bros. release involves a long, arduous trek through primitive country by two men in search of nine-year-old girl kidnapped by hostile Comanche Indians. They achieve their purpose after five years of determined prowling, punctuated by privation, skirmishes with Indians, armed battles with treacherous informants, and occasional returns to their Texas home base.

Wayne, the uncle of the kidnapped girl, is a complex character. His motivations, from the time he appears out of the southwest plains at his brother's ranch to his similar exit after he accomplishes his mission, are unclear. There are vague hints of a romance with his sister-in-law, an antagonistic relationship with his brother, and a feud with Ward Bond, a combination preacher and captain of the Texas Rangers. Wayne is a bitter, taciturn individual throughout and the reasons for his attitude are left to the imagination of the viewer. All that is known about him is that he fought in the Civil War and did not return home until three years after the war ended. There are indications that he wandered endlessly and did many things before deciding to return home.

His bitterness toward the Indians is understandable. They massacred his brother's family (except for the kidnapped girl) and destroyed the ranch. However, his reaction to the girl when she is finally found seems peculiar. He feels the girl has been defiled by the Indians during her years with them and he is determined to kill her. He rides her down and as she lies helplessly on the ground he approaches menacingly with his gun drawn. At the last moment, he changes his mind, lowers his gun, picks her up tenderly and returns her to a friendly ranch family. With his task finished, he rides off.

Wayne's partner in the search is Jeffrey Hunter, who has been cared for by Wayne's brother since the young man's family was massacred by the Comanches. Hunter and a rancher's daughter (Vera Miles) provide the romantic interest and the former is also involved in labored attempts at comedy relief—such as the purchase of a squaw instead of a blanket and a knock-down fight with Ken Curtis, his rival for Miss Miles' affections.

Wayne is fine in the role of the hard-bitten, misunderstood, and mysterious searcher and the rest of the cast acquits itself notably, including Hunter and Miss Miles. Also stand out are Bond as the colorful, top-hatted preacher-captain; Hank Worden, as a "tetch," old Indian scout; John Qualen, as a rancher; Harry Carey Jr., as Qualen's son, Olive Carey, as Qualen's wife, and Henry Brandon, as the hostile Indian chief.

The John Ford directorial stamp is unmistakable. It concentrates on the characters and establishes a definite mood. It's not sufficient, however, to overcome many of the weaknesses of the story. Winton C. Hoch's VistaVision lensing and other technical aspects are of top-notch quality. *Holl.*