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Produced by Joseph Losey and Norman Priggen, directed by Joseph Losey; screenplay by Evan Jones based on the play by John Wilson and a story by James Lausdale Hodson; photography by Denys Coop; music composed and played by Larry Adler. With Dirk Bogarde, Tom Courtenay, Leo McKern, Barry Foster.

This superbly sensitive story about a lowly soldier trapped by the "system" and inescapably doomed by it to execution for desertion stands equal to Kubrik's "Paths of Glory." Tom Courtenay, whose performance won the Best Actor Award at the 1964 EX Venice Festival, is nearly flawless in the role of Private Hamp, inarticulate and unaware of the consequences of his deed. Dirk Bogarde adds a touch of irony as the frustrated defense officer, perceptive and sympathetic toward his client, but knowing that his case is lost. Director Losey has avoided the pitfalls of what might have been a stagey, play-like movie by the fluency of his camera, the gruesome realism of the surroundings and a constant driving toward the inevitable conclusion.

Losey contrasts the stylized, properly military personalities of the officers with those of the unexpressive enlisted men, pitting them against each other in point and counterpoint almost like the Greek narrative and chorus. The depressing futility of Private Hamp's situation is accented by scenes which underline the mockery of the whole affair: the soldiers' sadistic game as they trap a rat and conduct a mock trial; or the drunken, spontaneous party held in Hamp's cell the night before his execution. The story ends on a final note of irony when the execution itself is bungled.

more

KING AND COUNTRY quotes

"A stark and unrelieved film of men in war, of a claustrophobic entrapment in the deadly ritual of human sacrifice. It is a horror story told in the flat, deadly tones of realism, a shocker in its cumulative detail. Mr. Losey is relentless. He does not linger over blood and gore; he is concerned with the quick rather than the dead, with the condition of the living, the cruel stupidities, the cold cloddishness and pragmatism and complete cynicism of men caught up in the subhuman ritual of organized slaughter." --- Judith Crist, N.Y. ~~HERALD~~

Herald Tribune

"It is an intense, compelling picture--a taut and devastating account of the drumhead court-martial and execution of a British ~~MAN~~ soldier in the First World War...But it is probably because it is so smashing--so stark and unrelenting in the way it exposes the cruelty of military justice and the filthiness and inhumanity of war--that its distributors have been cautious in putting it on view." --- Bosley Crowther, New York Times

"Painful, stirring film, which could easily have been nothing more than a sentimental anti-war movie about the little man and the big machine. But Director-Producer Joseph Losey has made KING AND COUNTRY a pity-and-terror-filled drama of death against life, and law against justice." --- Time

"KING AND COUNTRY is an impressive film, black-hearted and implacable. As a matter of interest, which has nothing to do with the quality of the film but a lot to do with the possibilities of film-making, it was shot in eighteen days on a budget of well under \$250,000." --- Penelope Gilliatt, Sight and Sound