

Document Citation

Title	Battle of River Plate
Author(s)	Harold Myers
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1956 Nov 06
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The battle of the River Plate, Powell, Michael, 1956

Battle of River Plate (BRITISH—VISION—COLOR)

Technically impressive filmization of defeat of Graf Spee in first major naval encounter of second World War.

London, Nov. 6.

Rank release of a Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger production. Stars John Gregson, Anthony Quayle and Peter Finch; features Bernard Lee and Ian Hunter. Written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Camera, Christopher Chillis; editor, Reginald Mills; music, Brian Easdale. At Odeon, Leicester Square, London. Running time, 119 MINS.

Captain Bell John Gregson
Commodore Harwood.... Anthony Quayle
Captain Langsdorff..... Peter Finch
Captain Parry Jack Gwillim
Captain Dove Bernard Lee
Mike Fowler Lionel Murton
Mr. Millington-Drake.... Anthony Bushell
Captain McCall Michael Goodliffe
Lieut. Commander Patrick MacNee
Dr. Oangmann John Chandos
Mr. Desmoulins Douglas Wilmer
Ray Martin William Squire
Capt. Varela Roger Delgado
Capt. Stubbs Andrew Cruickshank
Manola Christopher Lee
Pop Edward Atienza
Dolores April Olrich

By its selection for the Royal Command film gala, "Battle of River Plate" has garnered top quality publicity, which should be of immense help in promotion and exploitation. That aid won't go amiss for, despite its impressive technical achievements, it's lacking in human, emotional and dramatic qualities. It will need intensive selling, both in Britain and overseas to help it make the b.o. grade.

Defeat of the Graf Spee was the first major naval victory for Britain in the last big war and, as such, takes a prominent place in history. Apart from the strategy involved, it was also an exercise in subterfuge and diplomacy. All these points are neatly and simply brought out in the Michael Powell-Emeric Pressburger filmization. What they have failed to do, however, is to achieve any degree of characterization for the three naval commanders who led the British cruisers to victory against the Germans' more powerful pocket battleship. Indeed, the only really sympathetic character emerging from the screenplay is the skipper of the enemy ship.

The battle sequences, in which the lightweight British cruisers close in on the Graf Spee and give with all their firepower until they force the enemy to take shelter in Montevideo harbor, are powerful, exciting and technically impressive. However, there is some confusion as to the identity of the individual cruisers.

Story is given a neat twist by the diplomatic exchanges which take place while the Graf Spee is sheltering. The British Minister in Montevideo deliberately allows the leakage of a report that other Allied naval vessels are hurrying to the scene. When the Nazi battleship is obliged to leave harbor, the captain chooses to scuttle, rather than be outnumbered by his enemy. The atmosphere in Montevideo is heightened by a series of on-the-spot dramatic broadcasts to the U.S., a device which is most effective.

As written, produced and directed by Powell and Pressburger, the players are almost secondary to the ships themselves. John Gregson, as the skipper of the Exeter; Anthony Quayle, commodore on the Ajax; Ian Hunter, captain of the Ajax, and Jack Gwillim on the Achilles, give forthright portrayals. Peter Finch gets the plum role as the German captain, who emerges as a warm, sincere and kindly person. This attitude is helped by Bernard Lee's interpretation of Captain Dove, skipper of a merchantman which had been sunk by the Graf Spee. Lionel Murton, as the commentator; Anthony Bushell, as the British Minister; and Peter Fanning, as the Uruguayan foreign minister, lead an experienced supporting cast.

Myro.