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Sixty-Five Years of British Cinema

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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP. 1943. An Archer Production made at D. & P. Studios. Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Photographed by Georges Perinal. Edited by John Seabourne. Music composed and arranged by Allan Gray. Production designed in color by Alfred Junge. Military Adviser: Lt. General Sir Douglas Brownrigg, K.C.B. D.S.O. Courtesy The National Film Archive, British Film Institute, and the Walter Reade Organization. 131 minutes.

Cast: James McKechnie (Spud Wilson), Neville Mapp (Stuffy Graves), Vincent Holman (Club Porter, 1942), Roger Livesey (Clive Candy), David Hutcheson (Hoppy), Spencer Trevor (Period Blimp), Roland Culver (Colonel Betteridge), James Knight (Club Porter, 1902), Deborah Kerr (Edith Hunter), Dennis Arundell (Cafe Orchestra Leader), David Ward (Kaunitz), Jan van Loewen (Indignant Citizen), Valentine Dyll (von Schonborn), Carl Jaffe (von Reumann), Albert Lieven (von Ritter), Eric Maturin (Colonel Goodhead), Frith Banbury (Baby-face Fitzroy), Robert Harris (Embassy Secretary), Arthur Wontner (Embassy Counsellor), Count Zichy (Colonel Berg), Anton Walbrook (Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff), Jane Millican (Nurse Erna), Ursula Jeans (Frau von Kalteneck), Phyllis Morris (Pebble), Diana Marshall (Sibyl), Muriel Ake (Aunt Margaret), John Laurie (Murdoch), Reginald Tate (van Ziji), Captain W. Barrett, U.S. Army (The Texan), Corporal Thoma Palmer (The Sergeant), Yvonne Andreë (The Nun), Marjorie Gresley (The Matron), Deborah Kerr (Barbara Wynne), Felix Aylmer (The Bishop), Helen Debroy (Mrs. Wynne), Norman Pierce (Mr. Wynne), Harry Welchman (Major Davis), A. E. Matthews (President of Tribunal), Deborah Kerr (Johnny Cannon), Edward Cooper (B.B.C. Official), Joan Swinstead (Secretary).

"COLONEL BLIMP is a gentle character study of an English army man named Clive Candy (Roger Livesey) that is based on David Low's much less optimistic cartoons and much less admirable cartoon character. In the cartoons Blimp personifies all that is wrong with the English Tory; as Candy in the movie he can hardly make a mistake, and actions he is criticized for - such as wanting to fight the Nazis as a gentleman - are readily understood by him and corrected, causing no trouble...

...The story is told in a very leisurely way, mostly by talk, with little action by camera or people, few decisive moments, and transitional scenes that seem as costly and long as the main events. It is conservative in technique and about life, but it is a charming, warm-hearted, commendable production, filled with good acting and characterization.

Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell, who made the picture, show the ability to get character unstereotyped, individualized and definite, and they have constructed their scenes so that consistency and naturalness of character seem more important than what is being said, done or about to be done...

...The movie doesn't look with enough wholeness or daring at its life to make it a deeply moving or even mildly complicated experience. Its attitude about its hundreds of almost totally upper-class Englishmen is that they are very good people, and by the casting and treatment are receiving the rewards of a good life. It is ingeniously careful not to brag about them, or make them obviously heroic in the manner of Hollywood, and to be amused by stuffiness, funny looks and conservatism. There isn't a sign of discomfort over them, and nothing to indicate that anybody in England is living insecurely, meanly (there is one cruel South African), much less that the English had anything to do with causing their wars. The hero's endless soldiering, hunting and colony administration probably involved a good deal of character that is not accounted for by the movie. The criticism of the Germans seemed to me to be pleasantly pat, unoriginal and carefully fitted to the popular attitude of the moment toward Germans, and there is something unpleasantly finicky in the treatment of the one good German in the film. The technique is no more daring than what we are accustomed to, but both technique and content are worked to a tasteful, engaging point."

Manny Farber, The New Republic, April 30, 1945