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At this late date there is only so much you can do with a battle film—but Anthony Mann has done it again, and a little better, in "Men in War."

Director Mann's war is fought in microcosm—a single continuous action, in this case a retreat, by one Army platoon—in the general manner of such predecessors as "A Walk in the Sun," "The Steel Helmet," "Battle-ground" and "Attack!" But where "A Walk in the Sun" was poetic and "Attack!" was theatrical, "Men in War" seems just plain real. It has something of the on-the-spot reportage of, say, John Huston's memorable "San Pietro," made on the Italian front in World War II.

As the picture opens, Robert Ryan, a lieutenant, and 17 of his men are deployed on a hillside. The one with the walkie-talkie keeps repeating, tensely, "Red Dog 2 calling Sunrise 6 . . ." But there is no answer. The date is Sept. 6, 1950, and things are going badly with the American forces in Korea. The Communists are sweeping south toward Pusan, and Ryan and his platoon are surrounded on this small hill near the Naktong River.

Their only hope is to rejoin their division on Hill 465, some 15 miles southward; and even with their radio and weapons carrier out of commission, Ryan decides to try to make it. At this juncture a jeep driven by a sergeant and carrying a shell-shocked colonel veers into their midst. Ryan commandeers the jeep and they set out.

What follows is an unrelieved saga of suspense

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Honesty, Suspense Mark 'Men in War'

Continued from First Page and heartbreak. Suspense because, thanks to Camera-man Ernest Haller's skillful in-shooting, we feel as trapped as the men. (The movements of the enemy have never seemed so shadowy and stealthy.) And heartbreak because we come to have a real identification with them, individually as well as with the group.

For these are ordinary GIs — if GIs are ever ordinary. Philip Yordan, in his laconic screenplay from the novel, "Day Without End" ("Combat"), and Mann, in his tight direction, have avoided making each man a psychological case with a "story" of his own—bullying sergeant, crybaby kid, etc. The prototypes are present, and there is even a reminiscent conflict of sorts between the lieutenant and the jeep-driving sergeant, Aldo Ray — but they are muted, only suggested. In a word, underplayed.

Platoon Starts Out

The platoon starts out. Now the straggling marchers are subjected to a campaign of dreadful harassment—by snipers, shellfire, mines underfoot, Koreans posing as GIs. Ryan's hos-

tility continues to rise against Ray, who shoots first ("You don't have to see 'em to kill 'em!") and figures it out afterward; and at one point Ryan cries, "God help us if it takes your kind to win this war!"

Yet it is these two, outwardly so irreconcilable, who are driven together in the last extremity.

Convincing Portrayal

Hill 465, when they reach it, is occupied by the enemy.

The film ends as the sun comes up—and with it the embers of our hopes—on the second day. The finish is opportune, but we are grateful, for we have been pray-

ing, "Give them a break." Three survive.

I don't believe I have ever seen Ryan sustain a portrayal as convincingly, and Ray is fine. Robert Keith etches an extraordinary vignette as the colonel suffering shock, speechless, entombed within himself. Others strongly scoring are James Edwards as the mechanic (his death is poignantly depicted), Philip Pine and Nehemiah Persoff as sergeants and Vic Mor-

row as a combat-fatigued corporal.

"Men in War" was produced by Sidney Harmon for Security and a United Artists release. Its aim is as deadly and true as a sniper's bullet.

Home in Southland

Russell Nype, who is appearing in "Anniversary Waltz" at the Ritz Theater, has decided to call Beverley Hills his home in the future.