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DECEMBER 7TH: THE MOVIE

(DOCU-B&W)

A presentation of the War & Navy Dept. Produced by John Ford. Co-directed by Gregg Toland and John Ford. Screenplay, Toland; camera, Toland; editor, Robert Parrish; music, Alfred Newman; 2nd unit director, James C. Havens. Reviewed on videocassette. Running time: **85 MIN.**

With: Walter Huston, Harry Davenport, Dana Andrews, Paul Hurst; George O'Brien, James K. McGuinness (narrators).

Timed for the 50th anni of the Pearl Harbor air raid, this video release by Kit Parker Films provides the first public glimpse of the original 85-minute version of "December 7th." Retrieved footage — chiefly, two long sequences — does little to enhance film aesthetically, but it should be of big interest to history and film buffs.

Released in 1943 after Navy criticism and military censorship led to extensive cutting, docu won an Oscar in its 34-minute form. "December 7th" is only nominally a docu since most of it has reconstructions or allegorical dramatizations.

For the government film, producer John Ford had assigned acclaimed cinematographer Gregg Toland to direct and gather newsreel material at Pearl Harbor. Dissatisfied with what was available, Toland shot his own version of the attack on 20th Century Fox's backlot and wrote a feature-length script.

Though reportedly somewhat offput by Toland's approach, Ford backed him and directed some sequences. Released version consisted largely of the reconstruction, which supposedly fooled most people as the real thing, followed by a profile of an aroused military preparing to strike back.

Originally excised sequence shows a complacent Uncle Sam (Walter Huston) being needled by an elderly materialization of his conscience, Mr. C (Harry Davenport), who chastises Sam for lack of military preparedness and points out the potential dangers of inhabitants of Japanese origin in Hawaii.

The other cut sequence has Dana Andrews personifying the American dead at Pearl Harbor and philosophizing with a cynical deceased veteran of World War I in a kind of military afterlife. The camera tracks behind them as they pass rows of graves from various wars.

Script has the characters talking in ill-advised baseball jargon: America didn't want to play in the "International League," Woodrow Wilson was left "at third base," but now that "Uncle Sam is in there pitching," everyone is working for a "World Series pennant called peace."

— Fred Lombardi