

Script's Personalities of 1942 **No. 5 Frank Capra**

MAJOR Capra, Headquarters reports the acceptance of your enlistment in the U.S. Signal Corps and has assigned you to the Department of Inter-American Relations. You will report to Washington at once!" "Aye, ay, sir!"

Thus does Frank Capra, one of the few directors of Movieland whose name is 'starred' over the names of acting stars, go bounding off to serve his country at the very height of his career, even before he can be present at the release of his latest picture, a screen adaptation of that zany comedy mystery, "Arsenic and Old Lace."



The question naturally arises how come such unusual patriotism in an American of *foreign birth*. The answer is that, coming from Sicily to the U.S.A. in the steerage at the age of six, he so loves the country of his adoption that he will enlist in its military service even though it is technically at war with the country of his birth. And how come this intense love? Because his own life proves that this is the Land of Opportunity, permitting him to out-Horatio Alger in a living story of rags to riches. That story has been told many times, but a short review of it will explain how he rose from tree-pruner at sixty cents a day, living in a shack and writing stories at night, to a three-times Academy Award winner, the presidency of the Academy and of the Screen Directors' Guild—all within fifteen years.

Frank Capra

So to cut back: When our "Interesting Personality" arrived at the age of six, even his parents couldn't speak a word of English. The diminutive Frank learned the language from the headlines of newspapers he peddled. He must have learned darn fast because he landed in Manual Arts High School at the ripe age of twelve, in the meantime earning his own living by playing the banjo in dance cabarets at night. (Rob Wagner speaking: I remember Frank as a handsome young Wop, hell-bent on education. Cal Tech was his goal, chemistry his passion. No, I'm not responsible for his brains. All I taught him was strangle-holds, hammer locks and acrobatics. He was one of the sweetest kids of the bunch—a natural-born gentleman.)

Too young for college, Frank had to work two years before Cal Tech would take him. Even then he had to wait table in order to live. But live and study he did, with such success that he won a \$500 scholarship in his freshman year. In his senior year came World War I, and he enlisted in the Coast Artillery, hoping to be sent overseas. Not a chance, when he could speak five languages and was too valuable as an instructor. The Armistice found him a second lieutenant; discharged after thirteen months' service, he was without a degree, job, or civilian clothes. For a while he tutored, then returned to Cal Tech, and was graduated. Tried his hand at short-story writing, attended a fly-by-night scenario school. With a fistful of scripts, he made the rounds of the studios, finally sold a two-reeler to Christie Brothers. Next, to Mack Sennett's for an invaluable training in comedy. Made a notable success in directing Sennett's "toughest baby"—Harry Langdon.