PHOTOPLAY
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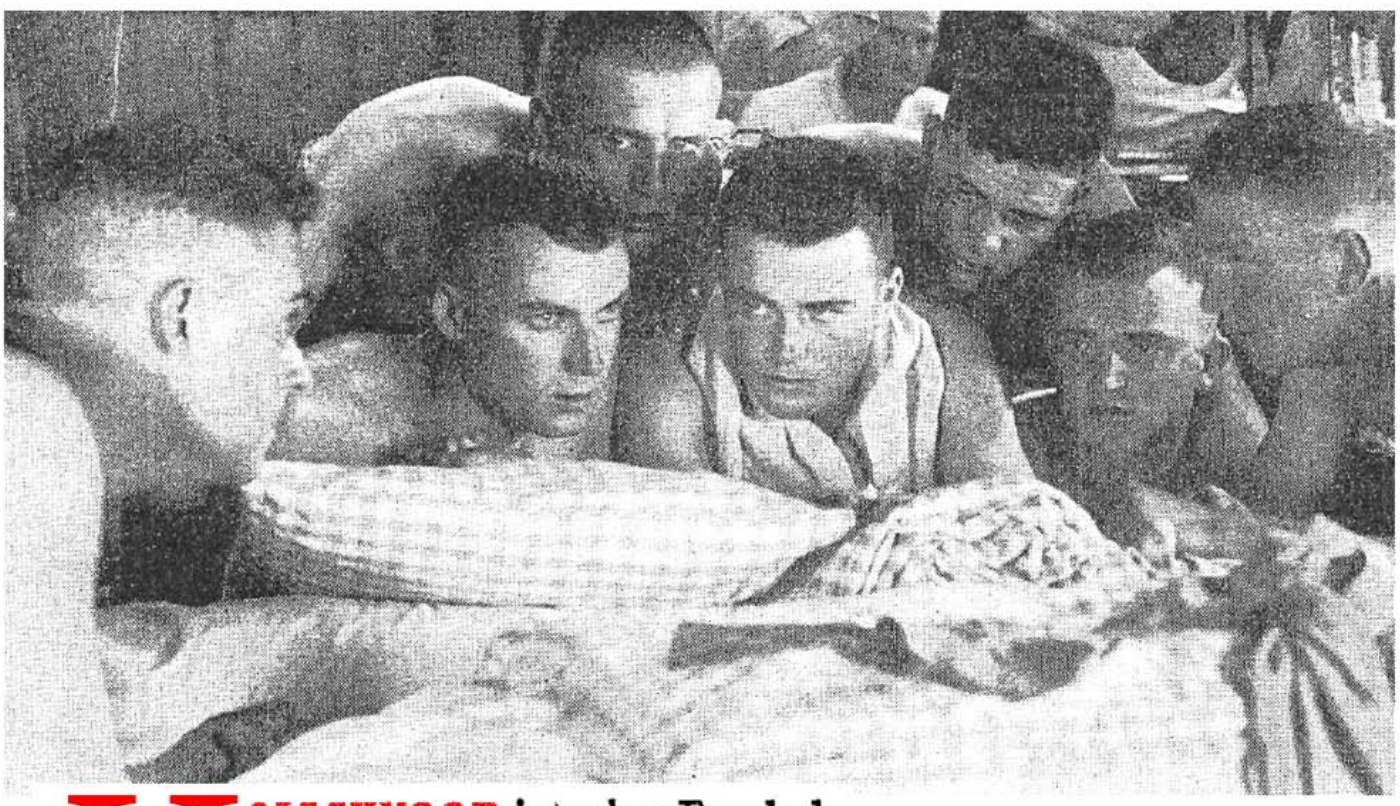
Seven Boys "On The Western Front"



The seven boys of "All Quiet on the Western Front" who grew up too fast in the film trenches. Left to right, Scott Kolk, Russell Gleason, Billy Bakewell, Lew Ayres, Owen Davis, Jr., Walter Brown Rogers and Ben Alexander

HOLLYWOOD is truly a Bagdad of old.

Somewhere in its shady canyons and sunny side streets, the magic of *Aladdin's* lamp must linger. Startling and unbelievable transformations take place over night. People suddenly develop entirely new personalities with new thoughts, new ideas, new hopes.

Pert little flappers will arrive in town and go capering about kicking up their heels like frisky lambs. Hey! hey! Suddenly, without a word of warning, they emerge dignified, domesticated and serious-minded young women with a mission in life.

Comedians, during luncheon, will become bosom heaving heavies, and heavies will and do become nuisances. Bathing beauties become titled aristocrats and aristocrats become—well, why go into it? One never knows whether his own Aunt Em will, on the morrow, be making apple butter or whoopee.

But one of the greatest and strangest transformations that Hollywood has ever seen has come to a group of seven of Hollywood's finest young men. Even picture people who have become more or less used to the *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde* act, look at one another and wonder.

Just a little over a year ago, seven young men from eighteen to twenty years of age, without a care or a thought beyond the good times of the next day, answered a call to arms and marched blithely away to location to make a picture. The boys of "All Quiet on the Western Front" had begun a lot of fun, they decided.

Six months later, a little band of weary youths trudged back to Hollywood. There were no boyish pranks, no wise-cracking among them now. Instead, there was a quietness, a calmness that was frightening to behold. Their eyes spoke of things their lips didn't—or couldn't. Somewhere, back there in a shell hole, or a bullet torn trench, each of those seven boys left behind him the boy who had marched so gaily away.

"It will wear off," Hollywood murmured. "It's bound to affect them this way. It will pass."

It hasn't.

A year has gone by and still that little group of boys cling together in a bond of strange companionship. Different. Set apart by one great experience. They are now, and one feels

Seven Boys

they always will be, the same sobered youths who trudged home in the mud-stained uniforms of German soldiers. No, it hasn't passed.

Young Ben Alexander, the *Kemmerich* of the picture, wasn't quite eighteen when the picture began. Ben was a *Penrodish* sort of lad who still enjoyed the sports of a Y. M. C. A. camp in the hills.

"I'd just started at the University of California," Ben said, "when they asked me to do the part. I hesitated a long time. Finally I gave up college to do it. Am I glad? Why, I learned more in those six months than any ten years of college could have given me. It's—it's just too big to talk about."

They all say that. It leaves them groping for words.

"Occasionally we'd be near enough to come home nights," he said. "It was the first time mother hadn't been with me on a set and she'd ask me what we'd done that day. I couldn't tell her. Mother couldn't understand, but it was so big, there was so much, I just couldn't talk about it.

"Finally the opening night came. I hadn't seen the preview and mother and I just sat there stunned. That night mother came into my room. She was crying a little, I guess. 'I understand now, Ben,' she said. 'I know why you couldn't tell me.' It certainly has made a difference in me. Life just up and smacked us in the face."

Billy Bakewell was *Albert Kropp*. "From the very first, once we got out there on location, we never felt we were making a picture," Billy said. "We believed it thoroughly. We were seven German fellows huddled together in a trench, fighting the same fight, living together week after week, month after month.

"WE got so steamed up over it sometimes we—we—I don't know how to tell you," he finished lamely. "We'd stand around before a bombardment, waiting, nervous and excited. Our hands often shook until we could scarcely light our cigarettes. Our hearts raced. Then it would come. Bombs, dynamite, shells whined and we were in the midst of it. Fighting, sweating together. We were often frightened. We felt exactly as those boys must have felt.

"And so many little things kept cropping up all through the picture. When we were making the schoolroom scene, remember the German soldiers who marched outside our window? One of those boys was a peach of a fellow. His name was George. One day we missed him. Someone told us he'd been injured going home the night before and we didn't see him again. Three months later we were making the hospital scene. 'I won't be a cripple," I screamed. 'I'll kill myself first!'

" 'Here buddy, you're all right,' someone said, handing me a mirror. 'Take a look at yourself.' Then I took the mirror and slanted it downward—remember?—so I could see my leg. Well, I slanted the mirror down and then I felt the flesh creep on my spine. My mirror showed an amputated leg. I dropped the glass with a crash. Then I saw. It was George. 'It's all right, Bill,' he said. 'I heard you were making this scene and I thought I might help a little. I could tell you how it felt, maybe.' I took his hand and just looked at him and I—I just lay there and cried like a baby. We both did.

"IT was things like that," he said quietly, "that kept coming up to hit a fellow. But I wouldn't trade what it's done to me for a million dollars."

"I used to feel the weight of the world rested on my shoulders, before I went into that picture," Russell Gleason (*Muller*) said. "I was the most serious minded person you ever saw. I weighed every fact carefully. I learned differently," he grinned. "I soon found out it doesn't make a particle of difference to the world what I think about it."

"George Cukor, our dialogue director, was a wonderful fellow. 'Fascinating youth,' he jeered at us. He mimicked our ways and expressions. 'Such coy young things. So itty,' he'd say. He held up a mirror of ourselves and each one of us took a good long look. He was right. We forgot fascinating youth. 'It.' If we had any left, Louis Wolheim, who played *Katczinsky*, kidded the rest of it out.

What the grimness and terror of "All Quiet" did to seven cocky, wise-cracking Hollywood kids who marched away to the talkie trenches

The boy who was made by "All Quiet" and whose brilliant work as *Paul Baumer* did much to make "All Quiet" a great picture. Lew Ayres, who came to talkie prominence and fortune in the film

"'Pewkes,' he called us. 'Young pewkes.' He'd talk to us by the hour in the trenches. He spared nobody. Neither did Mr. Milestone, our director. And we learned. I spent my twenty-first birthday in a shell hole on the movie battlefield. I lay there and thought things over."

Scott Kolk (*Leer*) had been a musician. Scott was a bit shy with strangers. He couldn't seem to get the hang of fellows. But he learned. He learned the meaning of true companionship in those weary months. He gained something and he lost something. But Scott, too, found himself.

Walter Brown Rogers (*Behm*) had a terrific Barrymore complex. It was serious with Walter.

He sniffed huge Barrymore sniffs and "Alas, poor Yoricked" all over the trenches. Then one day they placed a large bundle of dynamite in the ground. "You are to run, Walter," they told him, "and fall just a few short feet to the side. Turn your face away. You can do it?" they asked. "I'll do it," he said. He took his place. The others watched tensely. The signal was given.

He ran and fell. Just a few feet to the right the earth tore and thundered.

He lay still a terrific minute and then went through his scene.

Walter has lost his complex. He jokes about it now.

OWEN DAVIS, JR. (*Peter*), was a jolly, easy-going kind of kid.

The boy with the "smiling pan" they called him. Life was something to smile through with Owen.

They watched it go, that smile. A little at a time.

Lew Ayres, the never-to-be-forgotten *Paul* of the picture, sat across the table and looked into space. "I never could say what I felt about things very well," he finally said, "but since I finished that picture everything seems locked up tighter than ever.

"I can't seem glad, or sad, or anything. Wonderful things happen, lucky breaks, and I just can't even seem glad.

"Can you beat that? I am glad—don't misunderstand. Glad and grateful, but I just can't show it. I felt that thing so keenly. We went into that picture a group of average, wisecracking fellows. We didn't come out that way, I can tell you.

"After all, I was another fellow for six months. I wore *Paul's* uniform. I lived with his friends. I just *became* him somehow. Lew Ayres was someone I'd known back in the past. I *was Paul.*

"We'd work all day. Often all night. Dog-tired, we'd creep back to the little hotel to snatch a wink of sleep between scenes.

"Often we were too fagged out to drag down to eat.

"Seven fellows of us lived like this together. Tired, scared sometimes, and hungry. That's what made it so real. That's why everyone of us felt we were actually living the thing. We were those German fellows back there in the war.

"We were often soul sick and heart sick for them. No wonder you think we're a bit different."

AT the very end, those seven boys marched by in spirit with one long backward glance. Could they have been looking back at the carefree youth lost back there on a location battlefield?

Hollywood thinks so.