

MEN IN WAR

MANN MADE MOVIES

Anthony Mann is today seemingly a footnote in film history who is rarely given his due, and that's a shame since he was an extremely talented filmmaker who made great films in a variety of genres, several of which are bona fide classics of their genre. Mann began as an assistant director at RKO and Republic but quickly graduated to the director's chair in 1942 with *Dr. Broadway*. He toiled in low-budget programmers for several years, but it was his two back-to-back film noirs that really made people sit up and take notice – *T-Men* and *Raw Deal*. Both films are superb noirs with several amazing sequences thanks to Mann's stylish direction and the photography by the great John Alton. Even when he turned to a historical film like *Reign of Terror* (aka *The Black Book*) it was drenched in noir atmosphere.

In 1951 he made his first western and it was an instant classic – *Winchester '73*, which would begin a series of westerns he'd make with star James Stewart. Each of those were distinctive and unique – they were brooding, psychologically complex films and unique for their time – *Bend Of The River*, *The Naked Spur*, *The Man From Laramie* and others. He also made *Man Of The West*, another great oater, this one starring Gary Cooper. Then he ventured into other territories with the very entertaining bio-pic *The Glenn Miller Story* and the big-budget VistaVision and Technicolor *Strategic Air Command* (both starring James Stewart – together they made a total of eight films). He made two films in 1957 – the western, *The Tin Star*, starring Henry Fonda and Anthony Perkins, and *Men In War*, his first war film. The following year he brought *God's Little Acre* to the screen and then in the 1960s he directed two huge roadshow films, *El Cid* and *The Fall Of The Roman Empire*. He returned to war in *The Heroes of Telemark*, and passed away from a heart attack in 1968 while filming *A Dandy In Aspic*.

“TELL ME THE STORY OF THE FOOT SOLDIER AND I WILL TELL YOU THE STORY OF ALL WARS.”

Men In War is a terrific Mann made movie. It takes place in one day, September 6, 1950 during the Korean war, as we follow a platoon of bone-weary foot soldiers who've been cut off from their division. Without radio contact, and with nerves frayed, their leader, Lieutenant Benson tries to get them to a hill where he believes their division is. Along the way, they commandeer a jeep driven by Sergeant “Montana,” who is trying to get his shell-shocked Colonel to a hospital. As they make their way to the hill, they must deal with the silent but deadly Korean soldiers who dog them – they melt into the landscape and are impossible to see. Along the way, many soldiers die – Americans and Koreans. The film is beautifully written (credited to Philip Yordan and based on the novel *Day Without End* by Van Van Praag), beautifully shot in black-and-white by Ernest Haller (all filmed in Hollywood's Bronson Canyon), and features a great cast. Robert Ryan turns in a great performance as Benson, and Aldo Ray as “Montana” is also excellent. But every performance in the film is wonderful – Robert Keith is a lesson in great film acting as the Colonel – he speaks exactly one word in the film and that's in the last five minutes, but there's an entire screenplay going on in his eyes. The rest of the supporting cast makes the most of their screen time – Nehemiah Persoff, Phillip Pine, Vic Morrow, James Edwards, L.Q. Jones, and Scott Marlowe all get moments to shine. There are no back stories, there's none of the usual Screenwriting 101 malarky – just men in war, doing what they're told to do and trying to survive. Interestingly, the Pentagon refused any cooperation for the film, and condemned it for showing a US Army unit without discipline.

Tying all of its elements together is the fantastic score of Elmer Bernstein. Bernstein

did three films for Mann – *Men In War*, *The Tin Star*, and *God's Little Acre* (all three of which have been released on Kritzerland – in fact, with this release Kritzerland has issued the entirety of Bernstein's 1957 output with the exception of *Sweet Smell Of Success* – his four other films that year were *Fear Strikes Out*, *Men In War*, *The Tin Star*, and *Drango* – all currently available as limited edition CDs), and all three scores are great and all three completely different. *Men In War* begins with drums and jagged orchestral stabs, and then it is by turns pensive, intense, propulsive, brooding, and suspenseful as it captures the moods of the soldiers as they trudge on through dangerous terrain with their tensions at the breaking point. There is a vocal version of the theme that appears twice in the score presentation on CD, but which only appears once in the film, during the finale and end credit roll.

Men In War was originally released on Imperial Records in mono. There was a release in “stereo” but it was a weird fake “stereo” with some sort of spread and trying to shift things into different channels arbitrarily and not very well. Obviously, we are issuing the recording in mono, as it was recorded. The tapes, housed in the Capitol/EMI vaults, were in great condition and the mono sound is full-bodied, crisp, clean, and clear.

This is our seventh Elmer Bernstein release, and we would be happy to just keep releasing all of his never before on CD scores. Elmer Bernstein was one-of-a-kind and his music is part of the landscape of cinema. The fact that he was a wonderful, gentle soul is the icing on the cake.

— Bruce Kimmel