The Picture Business

War-time restrictions result in sets made from chewing gum ana glue, but cameras bravely continue to grind out epic after epic.

Here's proof that they can still pick 'em out in Hollywood. These girls were chosen by MGM to act in the Ziegfeld Follies. Wardrobe women are getting them ready for a coming number.

LOS ANGELES—The only thing head waiters in Hollywood used to have over their fellow workers in New York City was a carefree manner. Head waiters in the movie colony never had to think twice about placing people at the right tables; it was simply a matter of money brackets. You seated five-grand-a-weekers in the first row, three-grand-a-weekers in the second row, and so on down the line until you arrived at the five-hundred-a-week slave to whom you gave a seat in the men's room or just quietly threw out.

But the war has changed things, and nowadays there are enough five-grand-a-weekers to fill the Hollywood Bowl. It's a situation that is driving Hollywood head waiters nuts. There is the sad report, for example, of a former maitre d'hotel at Romanaoff's who, vacationing in a strait-jacket at a Beverly Hills sanatorium, keeps muttering to himself, "Go to hell, Mr. Mayer; no tables. Go to hell, Mr. Mayer; no tables."

No doubt about it, business in Hollywood is booming these days. You have only to compare the gross take of a peace-time year with that of 1944 to get the idea. In 1941, box offices throughout the U. S. raked in $684,000,000; last year that figure was almost doubled. Besides giving the industry a boom, the war has changed its manners and its traditions; the war, too, has brought Hollywood shortages, responsibility and Lauren Bacall.

You can't get the complete picture from fiscal reports. They fail to note such significant signs of the times as that an eatery on Sunset Strip is paying its dishwashers $7.50 a day or that extras whose mouths once watered at the mention of a day's work have become so snobby that Central Casting has instructed its switchboard girls to be polite to these low-caste members of the colony. "Never thought I'd see the day," one official said recently, "when the motto at Central Casting would be, 'The extra is always right.' It's about time those people got a break."

MAYBE it's because people haven't the gas to get out of town and maybe it's because it gives them the jitters just to sit by their radios and worry, but whatever the reason, movie houses that once were in the habit of booting out B pictures after a three-day run are now holding them for as long as three weeks, and any decent A release gets a box-office play that would make "Gone With the Wind" seem a flop.

The natural reluctance of exhibitors to change their marquee billing while a picture is still packing them in has caused most studios to slow down production. Most of them have a 6-to-8-month backlog of pictures. Quickie producers, those gentlemen who hang out on Gower Street

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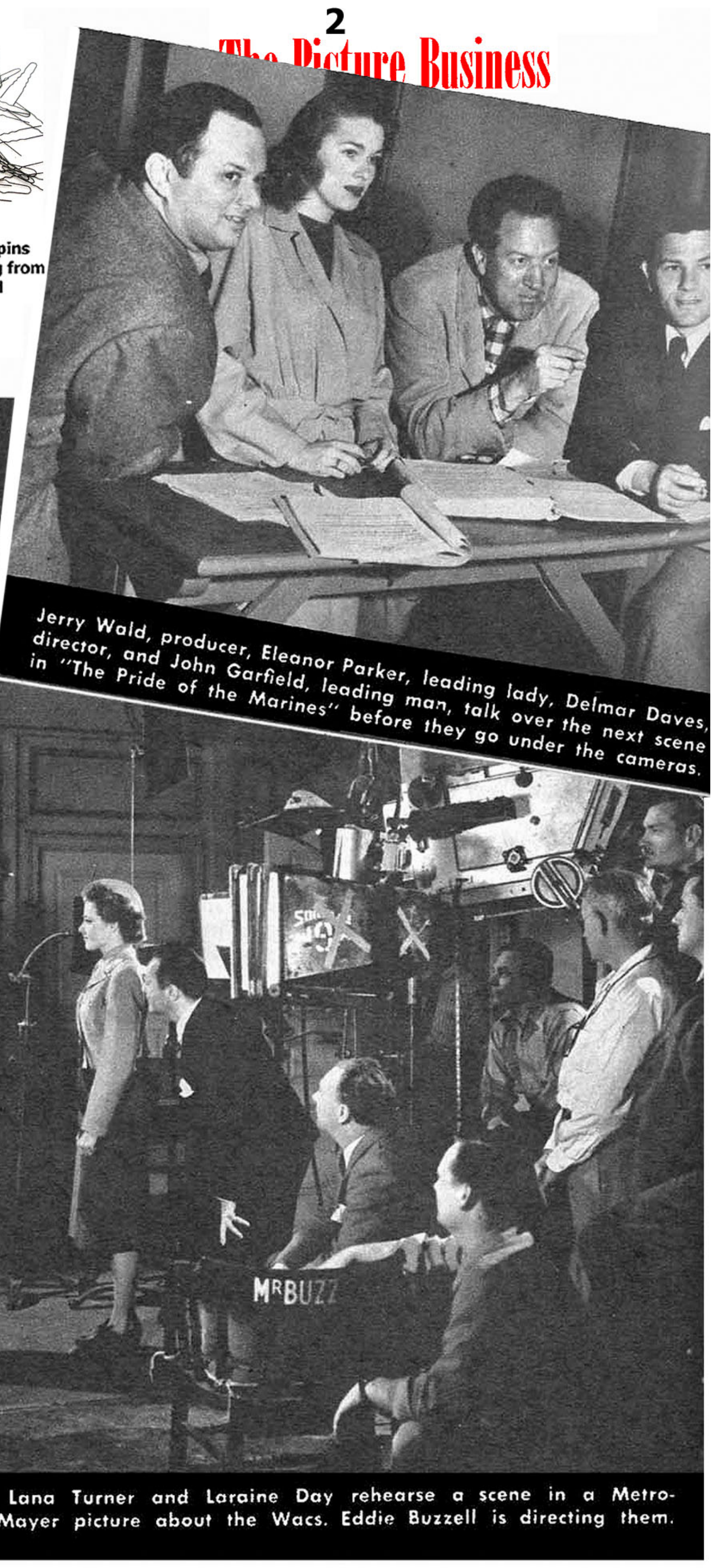
A few of the hair pins that were missing from Forties Hollywood



Jerry Wald, producer, Eleanor Parker, leading lady, Delmar Daves, director, and John Garfield, leading man, talk over the next scene in "The Pride of the Marines" before they go under the cameras.

Actresses Lana Turner and Laraine Day rehearse a scene in a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture about the Wacs. Eddie Buzzell is directing them.

making pictures out of a cigar and a promise, are in the chips and are seeing the inside of the Brown Derby for the first time in their lives.

One of these gentlemen got a little too money-hungry not long ago and is currently in court facing a suit filed against him by Noah Beery Jr. It seems the cuff-producer hired the actor at the handsome rate of $300 a day, placed him in front of a camera, and kept shooting him in various poses, with and without a black mask. After a single day of this, the producer paid Beery his 300 fish and bade him goodbye.

"I thought it was funny for that guy to hire me just for one day," Beery later said, "but I didn't think anything more about it until friends began to tell me how terrific I was in a serial called 'The Masked Rider.' Then I found out that this guy had used a masked extra through a series of 12 pictures, adding at the end of each chapter a picture of my undraped kisser."

Hollywood has its share of troubles during the war, by far the most important of which have been the drastic Government restrictions on supplies. Film, gasoline and lumber allotments were cut almost in half after Pearl Harbor, and art directors were ordered to limit the cost of sets to an average of $5,000. The studios received practically no nails at all and each studio was limited to a meager two pounds of hairpins a month. As a matter of fact, the shortage of nails and hairpins, trivial though such items may seem, at one point nearly stopped production. Carpenters were frantically pasting sets together with glue, and glamor girls had to let down their hair, Hays office or not.

So far as nails were concerned, the answer came from an enterprising carpenter who invented a Rube Goldberg device to pull them out of used lumber. It looked like something to smash atoms with but it did the trick and straightened the nails in the bargain.

To beat the hairpin shortage, studio hairdressers checked hairpins out as carefully as if each one of them were a Norden bombsight. Every night, actresses to whom mink coats are trifles were ordered to return their hairpins to their hairdressers, who sterilized the pins and then doled them out again the next day.

The film shortage was the toughest to beat. Directors found themselves hamstrung in the number of takes they could

shoot; no longer was a temperamental megaphone genius permitted to shoot the same scene 50 times. Actors were ordered to come to the sets prepared to face the camera with a polished version of their roles. Delmar Daves, a director at Warner Brothers, feels that in the long run the film shortage has been a boom to Hollywood. "The actors have had to know their lines," he says, "and it's made for less sloppy acting."

The restrictions inevitably brought many other changes to the industry. Art directors who once guarded secrets with their lives became real neighborly and borrowed sets from one another with the chummy nonchalance of a mess sergeant borrowing a cup of sugar from the next mess hall. Instead of building sets that would do for just one picture, studios took to designing them so that, with a little face-lifting, a middle-class home in Middletown could overnight become a swanky estate on Long Island. In one such instance, Warner Brothers by spending no more than chicken feed converted a set it had used as the humble home of a Philadelphia defense worker in "The Pride of the Marines" into the smart kiss-coop of a Pasadena playboy in "Mildred Pierce."

Tailoring its needs to conform with curtailed supplies is by no means the only way in which Hollywood has shown that it knows there's a war on. The movie industry has donated no less than 53,960 prints to overseas troops, half of them prints of full-length features. In addition, the Hollywood Victory Committee, in conjunction with the USO Camp Shows, has been supplying "live" talent right along to troops at home and overseas. To date, the total GI attendance in the U. S. alone has come to well over 60,000,000. No figures for attendance overseas are available, but USO performers have traveled more than 2,000,000 miles to entertain troops.

EVER since the Horsley brothers leased the old Blondeau Tavern and barn at Sunset and Gower in 1911 in which to produce the first movie in Hollywood, the star has been the most important element in cinema business. The war hasn't changed the system much. To be sure, the five top box-office names of 1944—Betty Grable, Bing Crosby, Gary Cooper, Spencer Tracy and Roy Rogers—are old favorites, but on the other hand there are a lot of new and already-famous faces around the lots these days.

The studios are giving the male contingent of this new talent the same old ballyhoo build-up, but with a new twist, generally believed to be based on the swooning fad started by The Voice, Frank Sinatra. Nowadays a male star is plugged in direct proportion to the number of girls who faint at the sight of him. In most instances, the press agent of a new glamor girl must get her

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