



Richard Gere is Matt, an American GI stationed in a small English town, in John Schlesinger's World War II romance "Yanks."



LOUISE SNIDER

## Warm romance recreates England of Yank invasion

Before the GIs landed in Normandy in 1944, they landed in England. "Yanks" (R) is about this "friendly invasion" revealed through the stories of three Americans in love with English women.

There were hundreds of thousands of American soldiers bivouacked outside the towns and villages — on golf courses, along the canals, in pastures. The amazing thing is that with all the tension and frictions, the English and the Yanks got on as well as they did. But director John Schlesinger has stacked the deck.

His GIs, on the whole, are a well-behaved and generous lot. They share their chocolates and canned goods with the hard-pressed English. They volunteer their vehicles and manpower for community events. And, of course, they fill up the coffers of the local merchants.

On the other hand, the group that could be expected to be most vocal and resentful about the American presence, the husbands and boyfriends of the women left behind, aren't around to challenge the GIs.

IT REMAINS for the concerned mothers to offer resistance. Rachel Roberts excels in a role that probably typifies the feelings of many English women at the time. She worries about her daughter dating an American, she doubts (even while realizing her own prejudice) that the Yanks are "decent" boys, and she scolds her daughter for not being loyal to her English soldier-boyfriend.

Lisa Eichhorn is luminous as a rosy-cheeked English beauty. Her reserved manner, glowing complexion and solid, middle-class morality capture the bygone image of the small-town girl, just as her slowly developing love affair with a GI (Richard Gere) recalls romantic ideals of more than three decades ago.

The nostalgia that these scenes evoke is paradoxical to be sure — a longing for the good old days of World War II. The film manages this, without sentiment, because in spite of the title, it says less about the American social impact on the English than it does about the quality of English life. This is the real core of the film.

Director Schlesinger beguiles his audience with a warm, intimate view of English small-town life. It is almost an idyllic kind of existence. The people all know and care about each other. Rich and poor, shopkeeper and aristocrat, they play in the local symphony together, attend each other's weddings and share in each other's grief.

What blights this Utopian society is a racial incident. At a New Year's Eve dance, white GIs start a fight when a black soldier dances with an English girl. The English are shocked by the display of prejudice.

THE IRONY of this episode will not go unnoticed among today's audiences in an England grown hostile to dark-skinned immigrants.

This is one among many authentic incidents that characterize an odd turn of history, the American colonization of the British Isles. Schlesinger has captured the experience in a richly detailed tapestry that audiences on both sides of the Atlantic can savor for its truth and humanity.



Two British women, Wendy Morgan as Mollie and Lisa Eichhorn (right) as Jean, wave goodbye to the American GIs they love in "Yanks," a Universal release.

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