



● Gordon Pinsent as Gen. Sam Hughes: Tory businessman finds war a *raison d'être*

man can't hear him - his hearing is gone as well.

Through the use of such brief moments from the front, the production subtly but effectively punctures the pomposity of bureaucrats using the war to advance their own political or military careers. This ironic edge keeps an interesting tension at work in the drama, a tension that is especially effective in the portrayal of Sam Hughes. For example, in a shot clearly alluding to the movie *Patton*, Hughes stands in front of the British/Canadian flag, giving a rousing speech about making the Canadian army "500,000 strong." After a slight delay, there is a polite sprinkle of applause for his rousing words. Such non-verbal signifiers recur throughout - a pause, a glance, a bit of music that subtly undercuts Hughes's world-view. At the same time, he emerges as almost larger-than-life: the hero with the tragic flaw. The achievement of *Sam Hughes's War* is that it is able to maintain the creative tension among its various levels of meaning.

I would have liked the role of Max Aitken (James Rankin) to have been more expanded, more clearly defined. As Canada's first press publicist for the war effort, Aitken's political manoeuvrings and insights into the use of film and print for propaganda purposes were clearly pivotal not only for the mobiliza-

tion of the home front, but also for the future directions in which government propaganda would be taken. In this production, Aitken (later, Lord Beaverbrook) remains a somewhat mysterious figure: clearly central to the intrigues, but rather nebulous and undefined in terms of exactly what he does. Had his press role been explored, the dimensions of war-time bureaucracy would have been even more fascinatingly illuminated.

Joyce Nelson ●

**SAM HUGHES'S WAR** d. Ronald Wilson exec. p. Peter Kelly p. Martin Kinch sc. Jim Burt cam. David Doherty. Ross Menzies, Tom Farquharson co-p. John Delmage, assoc. p. Sharon Keogh, p. asst. Stacey Curtis sc. asst. Jeanette Solomcoe unit man. Jacques Simard cast. Christine Shipton, Tina Neal cost. Hilary Corbett make-up Mario Cacioppo des. Ray Kellar hair. Sandra Petelko p. sec. Dana Mason ed. Peter Evans mus. Richard Bronskill l.p. Gordon Pinsent, Douglas Rain, Rony Van Bridge, Christopher Newton, Richard Donat, Peter Elliott, Mary Charlotte Wilcox, James Rankin, Marigold Charlesworth, Douglas Campbell, Rodger Barton, Raymond Clarke, Desmond Scott, Maurice Evans, Mervyn Blake, Claude Bede, David Gardner, Gillie Fenwick, John Innes, David Fox, David Main, Michel Lefebvre, Mary Charlotte Wilcox, Philip Craig, Herb Rolland, Darcy Dunlop, Leslie Yeo, David Clement, Brendan McKane, Ted Follows, Lewis Gordon, Howard Jerome, Reg Dreger, Herb Field, Anthony Bekenn, George Buza, William Colgate, Sam Malkin, Andrew Lewarne, Tom Rickert, Alan Katz running time: (Part I) 86'32", (Part II) 87'.

## Tom Shandel's **Walls**

Ought one to give a violent sociopath an even break?

The question remains very much open as the humanitarian social worker Joan Tremblay (Andrée Pelletier) slumps to her inevitable, bloody, stop-action death at the end of *Walls*, a low-budget 16mm film based on the famous 1975 hostage-taking by Andy Bruce at the now defunct B.C. Penitentiary. The socio-path in this case is Danny Baker (Winston Rekert), who has been doing stretches of time in "the hole" (solitary confinement) and who, after a brief reprieve to ordinary cell life, possible only because of the exertions of Joan and a humanitarian lawyer (Alan Scarfe), becomes fighting mad when returned there. It is then that he plots and executes his escape attempt, with three other prisoners holding Joan and five other prison staff hostage.

Rekert turns in a good performance as Danny, an intelligent (we are impressed by his reading "The Waste Land" in solitary - not easy with a berserker in the next cell) and, we suspect, misguidedly sincere if brutal drug addict. He is at Western Penitentiary because he slit a guard's belly back East in order to be transferred to this maximum-security institution near his mother, who is hospitalized nearby. Can we say that his heart was in the right place? Danny tells Joan that it is inhumane treatment that has forced him to use violence to get what he wants. This is not hard to believe; scenes of life in the hole show it to be what it no doubt is: psychic torture. Given the horror of his surroundings and the soul-destroying treatment he receives from his guards, it is no wonder that Danny is violent. The question is, how far can he be trusted with more freedom?

- *Walls* can provide no answer, only the suggestion that the solution lies far beyond the penitentiary precincts, in reform of our notions of crime and punishment; the question of what the true function of prison is, whether to punish, detain, or correct, has always been in debate. In the meantime prisons

remain an uneasy mixture of the three, a *pis aller* until we make up our minds, and they are controlled in practice by the wardens and guards who operate them. Just how cruel the guards are is known only to the prisoners, and it is on this point that the effectiveness of *Walls* depends. Unfortunately, some of the film's drama is dissipated in the uncertainty of a single issue: whether the guards did in fact plant drugs in the prisoners' cells in order to have a pretext to send them back to the hole.

The question is important because the answer would tell us whether it is the guards' cruelty or Danny's inability to cooperate that sends him back to solitary and galvanizes him to plot a desperate escape. We hear only in passing, as a throwaway when Joan is talking to another prison official, that the drugs were planted, and there is doubt that she may have been deceived by Danny, to whom she has been growing more attached as the focus of her cause. And so, just whose fault is Danny's final catastrophic eruption? We don't know, and our lack of knowledge prevents us from taking sides, from participating fully.

Christian Bruyere has written a competent screenplay here, wisely steering clear of an improbable love story (although classification officer Mary Steinhäuser was supposed to have been in love with Andy Bruce) and concentrating on a hardhitting, just-the-facts presentation (this viewer had to avert his face from wrist-slashings and countless hypodermic syringes being discharged into elbows). Tom Shandel's direction also has played up the documentary feel of the film, consciously minimizing any glamor that might attach to the lead players as would have done a 1940s Warner Bros. movie of this type. *Walls* is blemished, however, by an aggressively insipid and pervasive musical score by J. Douglas Dodds and Michael Oczko, which makes the film seem needlessly cheap and made-for-TV, and also a reverberant soundtrack in which some of the dialogue is lost. Cinematographer Douglas McKay has done well making the B.C. Pen look almost as dismal as it really was.

In their effort to expose a social problem through a personal drama the makers of *Walls* have been careful, but for this viewer they have in their fastidiousness made a few errors of emphasis. By leaving vague the precise degree of responsibility of Danny and



● Moral dilemmas in *Walls* as Winston Rekert holds Andréée Pelletier hostage

his warders they have revealed a lack of concern over Danny as an individual, and have thereby deprived the viewer of some of the dramatic participation to which he is entitled. As for the social issue, *Walls* hints that humaneness is the best attitude as far as making prison a more pleasant place goes, but that an atmosphere of trust and compassion can be poisoned in an instant so long as a capacity for cruelty remains in people. The film even leaves open the possibility that Joan was the cruellest of all, for making Danny believe in a mercy that was impractical and therefore could only be snatched away.

Paul Vitols ●

**WALLS** d. Tom Shandel sc. Christian Bruyère exec. p. Michael Chechik p. Christian Bruyère & Tom Shandel assoc. p. Tom Braidwood ed. Barbara Evans mus. J. Douglas Dodd & Michael Oczko d.o.p. Douglas McKay p. des. Graeme Murray p. man Tom Braidwood 1st ad.d. Bob Akester sc. sup. Christine Wilson 1st asst. cam. Trig Singer 2nd asst. cam. Joel Ransom gaffers Burt Skelton, Dave Anderson best boy Leonard Wolf, Jim Hurford key grip Fred Ransom loc. sd. Richard Patton sd. boom B.J. Clayden cost. des. Trish Keating ward. sup. Tish Monaghan prop. master Wayne McLaughlin asst. props. Bill Thumm make-up Linda A. Brown asst. make-up Phyllis Newman sd. ed. Jane Morrison, Ingrid Rosen asst. ed. Bruce Giesbrecht 2nd asst. ed. Patricia Isaacs neg. cut. Daniele De Foy sd. mix. Barry P. Jones set dec. Rose Marie McSherry asst. set dec. Della Johnston const. coord. Barry Broly lead carp. Garry Broly carp. Chris Prior lead painter Elmar Theissen sp. painter Philip Morgan set wireman Duncan McGregor greensman Mark Guildemeester labor. Ben Rusi, Bob Nicholson, Chris Wills, Dennis McBride 2nd a. d. Mathew O'Connor 3rd a. d. Rob Cowan university loc. Fitch Cady p. coord. Gabriella Martinelli, Catherine Howard p. acct. Elizabeth Pontsa cast. d. Lindsay Walker asst. cast. Michelle Allen, Hagan Beggs art work Cecilia Ohm-Eriksen sp. efx. Thomas Special Effects Ltd. sp. efx. tech. Bill Orr teamsters Ken Johnston, Ian Urquhart, George Grieve add. photog. Tobias Schliessler, Trig Singer p. asst. Christopher Haddock craft serv. Leslie Beale cater. Brown Cow lighting Canadian Prolite Inc. sec. Moss' Trucking Services mus. rec. Goldrush Recording Co. at Mushroom Studios, Vancouver post. p. Omni Film Productions Ltd. titles West Coast Film Opticals lab. Alpha Cine Services p. c. Jericho Films (604) 224-0506, 732-9983 intl. sales Films Transit (514) 527-9781 running time: 90 mins. lp. Winston Rekert, Andrée Pelletier, Alan Scarfe, John Wright, John Lord, Lloyd Berry, Howard Storey, Antony Holland, Elizabeth Leigh-Milne, Perry Long, Dale Wilson, Tony Morelli, Jacques Hubert, Raimund Stamm, Ron Sauvé, Blu Mankuma, Denis Nouveau, Kent Barrett, Christopher Haddock, Hagan Beggs, Judith Berlin, Mike Winlaw, Lon Katzman, Cam Lane, John Wardlow, Ted Stidder

society. At a time when "ordinary" men either sided with the Nazis or conveniently ignored their treatment of Jews, Grant risked his life to save people who were neither his family, co-religionists nor countrymen. As a price he suffered the horrors of wartime prison and concentration camps – and survived. This is hardly an ordinary, but a singular, complex, extraordinary man.

Yet the film, especially in its treatment of the early Vienna days, where his whole achievement just drops into his lap, chooses to simplify Grant in a way that seems false. A carefree Grant knocks about Europe until his money runs out in Vienna, at which point destiny provides a series of wonderful people to befriend him: they just can't help trusting his honest Canadian face. While playing up Grant's charmed life among the musicians, intellectuals and cultural elite of Vienna, the film avoids any emphasis that he moves among predominantly Jewish society. Its light-weight tone ignores the possibility Grant's benefactors might have had an ulterior motive – to place a sympathetic Gentile foreigner deliberately in an influential position to help them later.

The film eschews such complexity. It keeps safe distance from a theme which could have given it extraordinary emotional weight: Grant's personal identification with the Jews. Born into a WASP family whose anti-Semitism is ingrained (his mother, though working to get Jews into Canada, comments: "It's one thing to keep them out of clubs – I can understand that"), Grant himself bears no prejudice. The film never tells us why. Grant is fatherless; his uncle Manlus (Douglas Campbell) looks after him only from a sense of duty; his two father-figures, Jacob Goldman (Jan Rubes) and Paul Trefius (Peter Boretski), are both Jewish. This intriguing motif at best remains submerged. The film minimizes Grant's Canadian family life,

ending before his inevitable confrontation with his uncle and reunion with his mother, who reluctantly took up his cause.

*Charlie Grant's War* holds your interest largely because of R.H. Thomson's agile and skilled performance in the leading role. Thomson plays Grant as a typical Canadian hero – that is, a hero who is barely heroic. In manner, gesture and expression Thomson leaves no doubt Grant is a Canadian abroad, not an American or a Brit: unimpressed with airs and pomp, he still worries that his clothes are wrong. A Thomson performance is always a pleasure – his exuberance carries the role – yet it does not seem to convey the real Charlie Grant. That man's personal wars – against family, country and self – remain obscure.

Issues, not characters, shape *Charlie Grant's War* – the refugee question, Austria's collective responsibility, the Mackenzie King government's shameful policy toward Jewish immigration. The film emerges from CBC's docudrama tradition – Gough, Sandor and Lavut all have worked on the network's docudrama series *For The Record* – a tradition which tends to place social and political perspectives ahead of personal ones. Docudrama style accounts for the film's superfluous newsreel footage (the 1930s Austria setting alone should cue the impending Nazi rise) and its earnest journalistic tone. It uses Grant's personal story to illustrate the Canadian government's unconscionable anti-Semitism, featuring characterizations of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and Immigration Minister Frederick Blair, and informing us that Canada received a disgracefully low total of 5,000 Jewish refugees during that period (if Grant has been unsung, it is because most Canadians would prefer to forget their country's shame). Social criticism stands behind Grant's misplaced confidence that Canada would accept his Jewish

friends or the ironic banality of lines like "All citizens are treated equally in the civil service." But this political stance takes precedence over Grant's personal story. The film seldom accommodates the viewer's desire to look a little deeper into Grant's character.

When director Lavut can interrupt the social and political agenda long enough to fix his camera on the actors and keep it there, as when Jacob Goldman teaches Grant kaddish in the concentration-camp quarry, the film registers a substantial emotional impact. The concentration-camp sequence is the film's strongest, perhaps because all issues are reduced to the bare requirements of survival. However, these moments of genuine drama, as opposed to dramatized social criticism, are too few: the film needs less history, more Grant. But with an "ordinary" Grant at the centre, lacking conflict, self-doubt, or an engaging complexity, the docudrama approach cannot sustain the film's two hours and 15 minutes length and this compelling story rarely soars to compelling heights. *Charlie Grant's War* is by no means a bad film: if only it were not so damned undistinguished.

Bruce Malloch ●

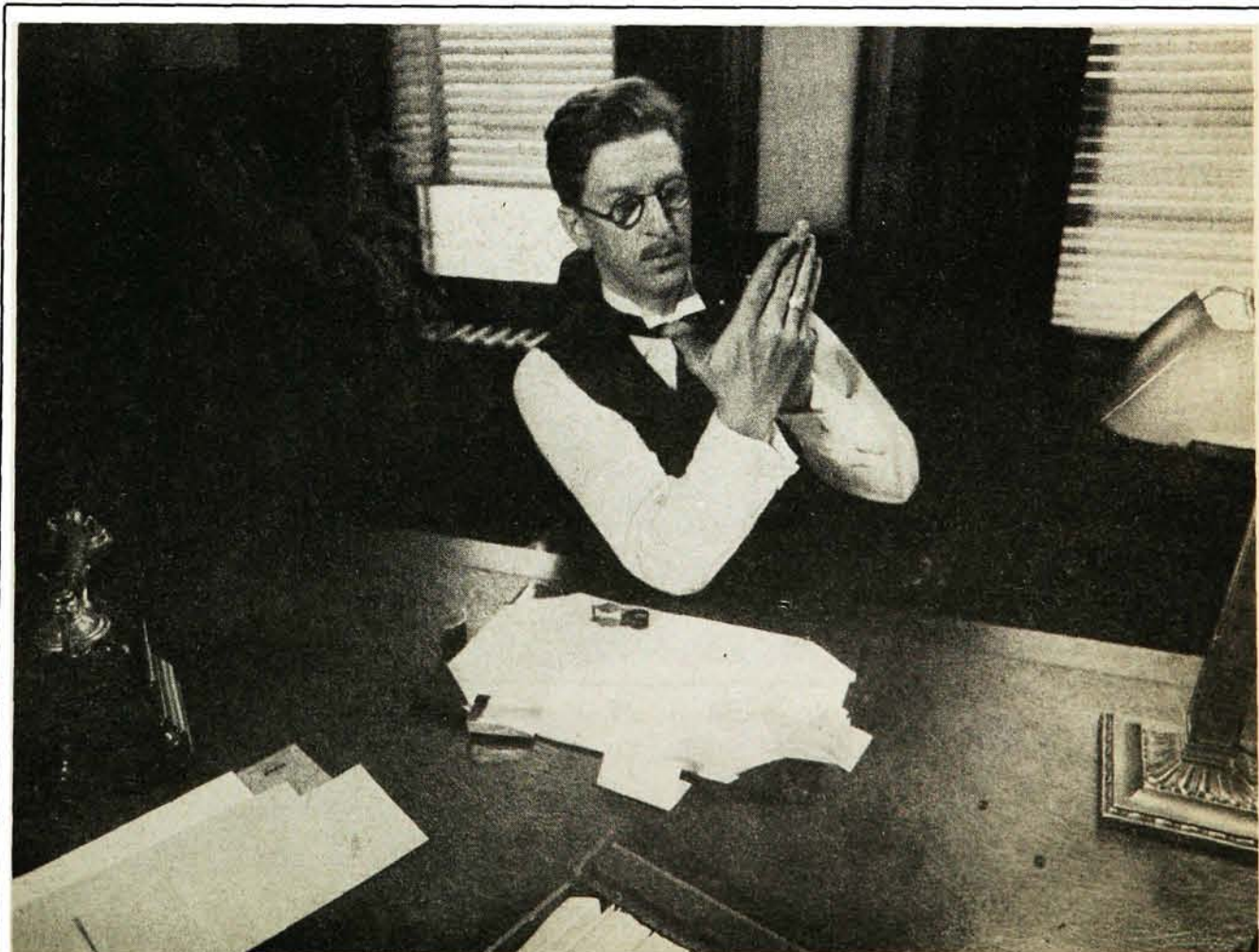
**CHARLIE GRANT'S WAR** d. Martin Lavut a.d. Rob Malenfant sc. Anna Sandor p. Bill Gough assoc. p. Harris Verge d.o.p. Vic Sarin orig. mus. Thomas LeGrady art. d. Arthur Herriott unit man. Neill Browne cast. Marsha Chesley, Doug Barnes film ed. Myrle Virgo p.c. CBC-TV l.p. R.H. Thomson, Joan Orenstein, Jan Rubes, Douglas Campbell, Marigold Charlesworth, Peter Boretski, John Friesen, Nicholas Rice, Annie Szomosi, David Bolt, Heinar Pillar, Michael J. Reynolds, Jean Archambault, Peter Dvorsky, Michael Fletcher, Belinda Metz, Charles Palmer, Larry Reynolds, Joe Cooper, Brendan McKane, Derek Keurvorst, Robin McCullough, Vlasta Vrana, Michael Tait, Don Macquarrie, Chris Bark running time: 129 mins.

Martin Lavut's

## Charlie Grant's War

CBC producer Bill Gough, writer Anna Sandor and director Martin Lavut chose to build *Charlie Grant's War* around the myth Grant was "an ordinary man who made a difference." It is an odd choice, given the details of Grant's life in this made-for-television feature, and one which reduces the film's dramatic scope.

Grant, an unsung Canadian hero who helped rescue 600 Viennese Jews from the Nazis before the Second World War, must have experienced radical personal changes in his lifetime. He left behind a complacent upperclass Vancouver existence when he journeyed to Europe in 1930, where eventually he became established in the Vienna diamond trade and mixed with the city's best



● R.H. Thomson as Charlie Grant: obscurity hiding behind an honest Canadian face