Attempted Salvage A Failure As Leaky Screen Play Sinks 'Bounty'

BY RAY NEEDHAM

On April 28, 1789, Captain William Bligh of "H. M. S. Bounty" refused water to a dying man and his crew mutinied. This relatively minor incident has inspired a series of literary and cinemagraphic creations, some of which must regretfully be classed as far more disastrous than the original mutiny.

In 1959 MGM again decided to refloat "The Bounty." Two years later their weary crews returned from Tahiti having used up three directors, a dozen scriptwriters, and $18.5 million. Was the resulting motion picture worth it? The answer, emphatically not.

FOR THE ENTIRETY of its one hundred seventy-nine minutes, "The Bounty" drags determinedly through hoarse platitudes of witless optimism ("The Blighs will lose; justice will always triumph!") and entire oceans of sentimental bilge ("I loved you more than I knew.")

Marlon Brando portrays Fletcher Christian, the aristocratic first mate who hates Bligh's cruelties and finally in a rage takes over the ship. One gets the impression that Brando's mind is not on his performance. As a result the viewer is fortunate if his mind is not on Brando's performance either.

TREVOR HOWARD as Captain Bligh must be credited with the only believable interpretation in the entire production. He sympathetically portrays Bligh as a pries who makes human sacrifices to Success. He is a puritan on a poopdeck who is determined to succeed at any price.

The real tragedy of "Mutiny on the Bounty" is its screenplay. In one unforgottably characteristic scene, Brando is pursuing three deserters across Tahiti. They promptly leap into a canoe containing several native lovelies and start paddling (the canoe, not the lovelies). Brando wades into the surf, hails a passing canoe like a New Yorker calling a cab in the rain, and shouts — what else? — "Follow that canoe!"

PRODUCERS OF "Mutiny" claim that the beautiful scenery alone makes the movie worth seeing. This reviewer agrees. Unfortunately however the beautiful scenery is not alone. It is wrapped up with Brando's Berlitz accent and a seemingly endless series of spectacular sunsets into which "The Bounty" sails, while one fervently hopes it will not return.

If, however, you find yourself in the Tower Theater remember that the cast contains five hundred beautiful native girls. Pay attention to them. If possible, pay attention to nothing else.