

...long live the Vietnam War

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rival the stunts and explosions are the tricks they play with reality. They turn the mess into an American victory. While claiming to have "anti-establishment" politics, the scripts read like a Ronald Reagan wet dream. The Vietnamese are made helpless in their country and the Americans are made into great guerilla fighters. And that's just the beginning of the reality disappearing act.

The MIA films handily erase the presence of blacks among the American troops. While over 60 per cent of the U.S. armed forces were black men and boys — mostly boys — the films all but overlook this fact. One in ten of the soldiers in prison camp scenes is black, while none of the MIAs, or the valiant heroes themselves, are black. Still, these are not the first films to play down the sacrifice and slaughter of those men in order to pander to the juicy demographics of the white filmgoer.

Curiously, these hawkishly pro-American intervention films are being made by people with little personal involvement in the Vietnam War. Ted Kotcheff, the director of *First Blood* and *Uncommon Valor*, is a Canadian. David Morrell, the creator of Rambo character, was also born here, as was director of the film of the same name.

Sylvester Stallone, the actor and writer who climaxes Rambo with the tear choked lines — "Hate my country? I'd die for it! I want what every guy who came over here and spilled his guts wants... for our country to love us as much as we love it!" — is the very same Sylvester Stallone that sat out the Vietnam War, expressing his gung-ho patriotism by avoiding the draft during the real war by working as an athletic coach at a Swiss private school. He also spent time as an acting student and a some-time porn movie actor.

Some American Vietnam veterans are finding Stallone's new-found patriotism too much to bear. "He apparently feels he can represent all vets but we don't like that," says Eduardo Cohen of the Veteran's Speakers Alliance, which has organized pickets of California theatres screening the film. "He doesn't know what we went through.

"We, too, were brainwashed with similar propaganda before the Vietnam war," says Cohen. "When we got to Vietnam we found it wasn't like a John Wayne movie."

So did the people already living there. But they may as well have been Indians in a John Wayne cowboy movie for all the care these movies exhibit for the Vietnamese people. Once again, the country becomes the backdrop for American suffering, American triumph, and American stories. In each film there are two types of Vietnamese: noble assistants (one reason the U.S. was over there in the first place) and yellow horde (the other reason). Both types are amply killed in battle.

Rambo takes this good-race/bad-race split to an almost pornographic pitch. The only "good" Vietnamese Rambo sees on his mission is a woman guerrilla fighter who gets blasted in the back not a half-minute after she and Rambo soul kiss; her only saving grace seems to be her ability to speak English. The Yellow Horde aren't as culturally privileged, so all other Vietnamese are depicted throughout the film as less than human.

We are shown scenes of young girls "willingly" used for sex to demonstrate the perversity of the bad race. The soldiers exist as just so much target practice for Rambo. Because the troops frantically, nervously screech at each other in a caricature of Vietnamese speech, they're easier to keep depersonalized, easier to laugh at, and more fun for Rambo to kill. The only Vietnamese man given any kind of personality is their shifty leader who shoots the "good" woman in the back, and Rambo blows him up with an explosive-tipped arrow to the gut.

The Russian troops in the film are treated no better, but their white (and therefore more preferable) skin makes it more difficult for the filmmakers to develop the same pitch of racism.

The film also resurrects a political belief very much in line with the world of Ronbo Reagan, and that is the Domino theory. The ideology of battling communism at any cost has full expression in these films without really bothering to touch on the issue; these men are just out to rescue their buddies, and along the way happen to show what weak-



Uncommon Valor: Hollywood's valiant struggle for American hearts and minds.

kneed liberals wrought by not letting them "win" the war.

It's up to *Red Dawn* to put the real cap on what this Domino revivalism means. In that

film, communism is the insidious cancer it was in the early '60's, spreading from country to country like *The Great Flood*, having no relation to social causes such as a desire to

dump oppressive regimes. The Nicaraguan revolution jumps its banks and engulfs Mexico in a few short years; the Green Party in West Germany causes the annexation of Europe. It's not clear whether or not the NDP causes Canada's compartmentalization into 12 Soviet states, or whether the commie liberals or PC's take care of that with their "Socialized" medicine and crown corporations. Director-writer John Milius (executive producer of *Uncommon Valor*) leaves such Canadian scenarios up to the viewer's imagination, but through his perspective, shared by the new gung-ho Vietnam War films, only a complete roll-back of the red tide will make the world safe for survivalists. It isn't too difficult to see what that means if you're living in Managua or the mountains of El Salvador.

The final equation goes something like this: take a newfound belief that America never really "lost" the Vietnam war, add faith in these mythic military warriors, an America-first attitude, and a willingness to separate a people into pure good and evil, and the sum equals a perfect climate for Central American invasion. If anything, the analogy works too well. With the help of films like *Rambo* and *Red Dawn*, the first battles in the perception war are being fought right now, even here in Canada. Reagan's men may be out to rewrite history, but one recent slogan of the political Left may be applicable for the Right's causes as well: "El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam." To which Rambo would just as eagerly rejoin, "Do we get to win this time?"

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