

# Is it "Whiffs" or is it "Stinks"?

by donalee moulton

1976 is sure to go down as a year of cinematic plot revival or perhaps more accurately as the year of the re-run. Love stories, suspense films, catastrophes, and comedy, are all being flashed again and again on the screen. Revivals of this nature are not necessarily devoid of merit or unenjoyable if some degree of originality is employed but to date no injection of originality is apparent.

"Echos of a Summer" is merely an echo of "Sunshine" which was only a poor copy of "Love Story". "Tidal Wave" is the aftermath of "Earthquake" which is the blood brother to "The Towering Inferno" which is of course sister to "Juggernaut" and the "Poseidon

Adventure". The latest (of the what can only be terms "rotten revivals") is a grossly underplayed, underwritten, take-off on the hilarious comedy "Mash". This apery of a film, and I use the term loosely, goes by the name of "Whiffs" and that is precisely what it is—a mere whiff of the comedy found in "Mash". Instead of laughs "Whiffs" is lucky to get a whimper out of the audience.

Like "Mash", "Whiffs" centers on the army, and army life. This time though it is not the medical area but the chemical warfare branch. Elliott Gould plays the human guinea pig who has constantly subjected himself to every kind of chemical imaginable. The

result is one hell of a warped human being, who rather than comical is pathetic. But Gould as Sgt. Frapper does not see himself as such—what he has done he has done with a passion and a high regard for his duty—his duty to the army, the good ol' U.S. of A., and humanity. All that he did, he did for peace.

Finally though, Frapper's body does not meet the standards of army requirements and he is discharged. Out in the world of civilians Frapper is no longer a hero but a fool, an unemployed, impotent fool who just cannot make it. That is until he meets up with an old guinea pig friend who is also an ex-con. At this point Frapper is introduced to the criminal world and finds himself a success, with the help of gas he has stolen from the army warehouses. Frapper's illegal endeavors culminate in an all out gas attack on a small city which has two banks.

On paper the plot has potential; the film has first rate performers, but the script has no laughs. The film opens on a slow note, continues

in this monotonous vein and ends, again in a very subdued key.

Certain segments of the film are fairly funny. (The movie has no extremes, it is neither arousing nor utterly boring, neither good nor bad, memorable or forgettable.) Results of gas inhalation on the volunteers and the non-volunteer citizens of the unsuspecting city deserve a laugh, if in a really good mood, perhaps two. Eddie Albert as Frapper's superior deserves credit—his acting is better than his usual performance, the character he plays is not a stereotype, and the majority of scenes he is seen in are the only ones which are capable of evoking any response other than indifference.

The audience? Well their response is what can only be expected—they go out for a smoke, maybe to the can, they shuffle, squirm, and wait anxiously for the conclusion. A conclusion, that almost was, but couldn't quite, make it.



Dal Theatre Dept's February production of *Hot I Baltimore*. (L-R) R.W. Ashbaugh, Jonathan McKenzie and Patricia Vanstone. Intrepid reporter Ron "Scoop" Norman failed to meet copy deadline, but says he enjoyed it — sends regrets.

## Conduct Unbecoming

by Dorothy Becker

As Richard Nixon galvants in China these post-Watergate days, the concept of public "honor" seems to have become much more like a rusty and broken old sword than a shining instrument of justice and dignity. **Conduct Unbecoming** is a film about honor and swords, and about the decidedly inglorious uses to which both may be put.

The setting is India during the British rule of the last century, when two young Englishmen, Millington (James Faulkner) and Drake (Michael York), arrive to report for duty at the headquarters of a British regiment situated in an Indian outpost. Drake, fair-haired, eager to please, and a "gentleman of honor" is determined to succeed in the regiment. Millington, dark, brooding and sensual, regards the whole venture with mocking scorn and is determined to get himself sent home.

Very quickly, we are aware of the rigid hierarchy and the unbreakable codes of behavior to be followed in the regiment when the two young men are given their introductory orders by the adjutant: they are to be silent, obedient and completely inconspicuous. Millington immediately breaks the rules when he pays a public compliment to Ms. Scarlet (Susannah York), the beautiful, if slightly less than honorable, young widow of a recently killed officer-hero. Drake is conscientious, and he

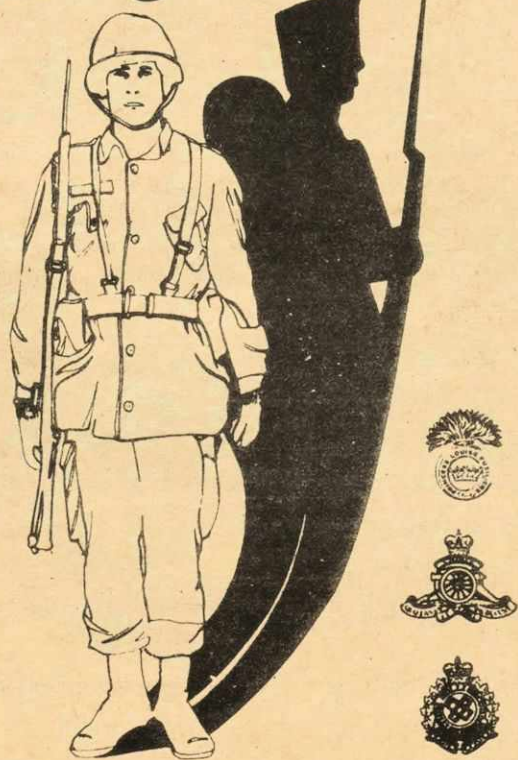
participates in the traditional game of the regiment: one man pulls a stuffed pig, full speed, through the officers' mess, while the others try to pierce it from behind with their swords.

Life in the regiment consists of brave deeds, "manly" good fun, and charming social events where beautiful and pure (well, almost!) young ladies dance and flirt with gallant officers.

This atmosphere of Victorian idealism is abruptly shattered when, during a dance, Mrs. Scarlet is attacked with a sword in the garden. Millington is accused and young Drake is chosen to defend him in the secret midnight sessions of "subaltern's court". It is assumed that the honor of the regiment must be protected at all costs from this upheaval of obscenity and violence within its own ranks. The trial forces into the open, the conflicts between the officers sense of public "honor" and loyalties to personal friendships. The film ends with a twist of irony.

This film is very colorful and surprisingly non-violent; although it conveys, almost continuously, an undercurrent of threatening suspense which, at times, almost culminates in horror. The acting is competent—besides in addition to the actors already mentioned, Stacy Keach, Christopher Plummer, Richard Attenborough and Trevor Howard complete the cast—and the story seems a relevant comment on the fragility of "unbreakable" codes.

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