



## CASUALTIES OF WAR

(DIRECTOR : BRIAN DE PALMA)

In the end it is many things. As a purely sociological exercise it showcases the explosion of societal male values in a situation where the terrors of brutal war rip the flesh off a thinly veiled psyche. It documents an unequivocal manifestation of horrendous indifference and subjugation of the opposite sex. As an open-ended exercise in the school of Aesop, it barely grazes the surface of the conflict between good and evil, but it is a lesson that can at first seem so nonchalantly brutal that the subliminal impact is far greater. At it's foremost however, casualties or war is a brilliant piece of film making. In this film adaptation of an actual event that occurred during the middle of the Vietnam war, Brian De Palma has realized his most important contribution to cinema to date.



Ripped off from the New Yorker

from several certain deaths during a brief but heart stopping fire fight).

All that changes very quickly. A sniper opens fire and Brownie is gravely wounded. Later in the barracks, one of the more significant shifts in the scenario occurs. On asking about the fate of Brownie, Penn, while shaving, coldly announces that he is dead; this after learning that despite an already grueling tour of duty he has to lead his men on an almost suicidal tramp to a viet cong encampment. Suddenly we are witness to his realization of the futile and gutless manipulation of his kind in this war. The result sends the young leader into an emotional tail-spin. The flying sparks of a maturation from loudmouth die hard to a nihilistic hardened veteran are so tangible, even at this early stage, that we expect the worst. And the worst we get.

the enemy encampment and it is here that the horror reaches a climax. He is unaware that the girl has already been repeatedly stabbed and continues to return fire. But the girl is not yet dead. In several excruciatingly painful minutes the blood spattered vision almost floats over the railway bridge high above the river while the deafening crackle of automatic weaponry completely fills the air. She is caught between Eriksson and the rest of the platoon - the former unable to prevent the latter from shredding her frail and incomprehensibly violated presence to a final peace.

The shortest part of the film deals with Eriksson's conviction that what has happened must not go unpunished. His superiors are disgusted that he should pursue this quest and of these, a black lieutenant, actually draws a parallel between his own experience of oppression and that of the native peoples. 'Just drop it' he says. 'You have to accept the unavoidable'.

Extremely harrowing in its own right, casualties of war is not in a traditional sense a film about war. But when it chooses to address the issue it does so with gut-wrenching power. Early on in the film Eriksson is shown on the path leading from a burning village joined by several hundred other troops and the recently evicted tenants. By now he is becoming increasingly hardened such that when a tall gawky flower of a teenage soldier is on the verge of Tears looking for his own platoon ('Can't I come with you?' he inquires summoning visions of playgrounds) he is told in no uncertain terms to make himself scarce. Several seconds later he is gruesomely extinguished by snip er-fire and we all gasp at the obvious metaphor. But then this work is a rich tapestry of messages and one can only feel somewhat disturbed to confront the grim juxtaposition of being so thoroughly moved in the enjoyment of a film whose content deals with subjects that are so entirely reprehensible.

STEVE GRIFFITHS



In essence the premise is stupefyingly simple. Eriksson is the grunt 'frosh'. He is a young family man with the sweetness and ideals of an individual that honestly believes in the gift of human life (but unfortunately not smart enough to pursue farm work in Alberta at the time). In the tortured madness of South-East Asia however, he is to be thrown in with a more common and reprehensible aspect of Americana, namely the easily impressionable gung-ho, brainless acts of braggadocio and the recipients of the worst examples of barely credible bullshit that their country has chosen to feed them.

Who better to play the protagonist of the early kindred spirit of a kinder, gentler Yankee than Michael J. Fox? And who better than Sean Penn to play the brash and pragmatist leader of the troop that at first is almost endearing to the audience as the streetwise sergeant Meserve: barely out of his teens and yearning to go home.

At first we settle in for a fairly routine appraisal of the major characters. New-boy Eriksson is

befriended by Brownie, Erik King, the black sergeant puzzled but secretly delighted by the neophyte's attempts at meeting the natives. During a rest in a Vietnamese village, Eriksson takes his boots off and helps an old peasant plough his rice paddies, but Brownie soon calls him in, fearing exposure of the group of men, but all the while beaming a beatific grin. It is almost as if Eriksson believes he is really on some form of third-world encounter experiment and that in reality, the war is a figment of some bureaucrat's imagination (this despite the efforts of De Palma to show us that Penn has just saved him

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