

Green Berets Invade Detroit

Thomas Haroldson

1968

John Wayne BIFF! has made a new movie POW! called "The Green Berets" AAP! It's currently appearing at the Adams Theatre, and I want all you weak-kneed, yellow-bellied draft dodgers out there to double time down to see it.

The picture should be seen by everybody in town because it's not everyday that one gets a chance to see the worst war movie ever made. In fact, "The Green Berets" is so bad that it has virtually unhinged the minds of several film critics. Renata Adler, writing in the ultra-straight *New York Times*, said:

"The film is so unspeakable, so stupid, so rotten and false in every detail that it passes through being fun, through being funny, through being camp, through everything and becomes an invitation to grieve...It is vile and insane. On top of that, it is dull."

Needless to say, Miss Adler did not care for the picture. About all I can add to her passionate outburst is an explanation of what brought it about.

For one thing, the picture is much, much too long. Two hours and twenty minutes of John Wayne is almost beyond human endurance. And to make matters worse, the first hour is completely devoid of action, and is about as interesting as an educational film on traffic safety.

But even when the Green Berets finally get down to the nitty-gritty of combat, the movie remains relatively unexciting.

The plot (if that's what it can be called) doesn't even have the basic dramatic tension of a good cowboy picture.

For example, when the Viet Cong attack an outpost, John Wayne, dressed in civilian clothes, is enjoying himself in a private nightclub in town. I thought at this point that the picture would finally get going. I was all set for big Duke to climb into his uniform, grab a helicopter, and rush out into the night to rescue his men. John Wayne to the rescue—what else?



The real-life John Waynes display their handiwork in Vietnam. The photo was sent to *Vietnam GI*, an anti-war paper edited by Vietnam Vets in Chicago. Photo courtesy of Vietnam GI/LNS.

Well, he does fly back to his men, but only to have his helicopter shot out from under him. He continues to stumble around ineffectually until he and the rest of the Green Berets lose the battle and are driven off into the jungle. What a letdown! Imagine, John Wayne being defeated by the Viet Cong.

What happens next will probably go down as the greatest anticlimax in film history. After being beaten by the VC, our hero calls down a mini-airstrike on the now occupied camp. A converted DC-3, with automatic machine guns, swoops down to tree top level and promptly wipes out every dirty commie in sight.

The next morning, the Green Berets quietly return to the camp and cut down the Viet Cong flag. As I remember, heroism used to be made of sterner stuff.

At this point, David Janssen, who plays a soft-headed liberal reporter, finally sees the light. He says good-bye to Wayne and promises to write the “truth” about the war—that is, if his liberal editor doesn’t fire him. (And now we know how liberal editors keep honest reporters from telling the truth).

Thus the picture ends—right? Wrong. It still has another forty minutes to go. However, since director-actor Wayne has obviously used up his screenplay, the only thing he can do is to start all over again, and that’s just about what he does.

The last segment of the picture, however, is so ludicrous that it isn’t worth describing. It is nothing more than a tacked-on remake of a World War II B movie (a General must be captured alive behind enemy lines etc., etc.) The only problem is that the old script was not updated and the entire episode seems to take place in Germany.

Many film critics, like Miss Adler, have expressed moral outrage at what the picture attempts to say, but I can’t get too excited about its childish propaganda message. In fact; “the Green Berets” is such an obnoxious movie that it probably will help the anti-war movement.

Once the situation-comedy humor, the mindless plot, the gross sentimentality, and the atrocious acting have been dismissed, the only thing left to get really upset about is the use the picture makes of porno-sadism.

The technicolor camera often lingers obscenely as men are shot, blown to pieces, stabbed, burned to death and impaled on wooden stakes. Some of the devices used to bring people to bloody, agonizing ends would have been considered crude even back in the Middle Ages. However, since the blood and guts scenes clearly delighted the audience, apparently they served their purpose.

The picture, of course, lies about the war in every way imaginable, but this doesn’t come as any great surprise. The only surprise is that it lies so poorly.



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