

# Reviews

**"Platoon"**  
Directed by Oliver Stone  
Starring Tom Berenger,  
Willem Dafoe and Char-  
lie Sheen

★★★★

Hollywood has provided several interesting films about the Vietnam War.

First came John Wayne's horrible "The Green Berets," a film that insulted the audience by reducing America's most controversial war to a simple good guys versus bad guys shoot 'em up. Then there was Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now," an allegorical tale of insanity set in one of the most insane periods of American history. Then there was Michael Cimino's "The Deer

Hunter" and Hal Ashby's "Coming Home," two gripping stories about the way the war destroyed the lives of those who fought and those who stayed home. Vietnam became a popular target, and tons of anti-war films were made.

With the rise of Reaganism there was a rise of patriotic films, and anti-war films became unpopular. The best patriotic films usually have to take place during a war and, since Vietnam was the war most people remembered, Vietnam became *that* war. All political, social, philosophical and moral questions were stripped away to give Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Norris an endless supply of bodies to destroy.

"Platoon" is the newest and most realistic film about Vietnam. The film was written and directed by Oliver Stone, a man who spent the late '60s fighting the Viet Cong. (During this time Stallone was making porno movies and Norris was practicing to be Bruce Lee's punching bag.) "Platoon" is taken from Stone's experiences during the war.

"Platoon" is the story of Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen), a 19-year-old college drop-out who joins the army in 1967 because he wants to do his share for his country, just like his grandfather who served in World War I and his father who served in World War II. Taylor soon learns that this is not the same type of war his father and grandfather fought.

The Viet Cong were a frightening enemy. They were rarely seen — a platoon would be marching through the jungle and then all hell would break loose. After a few minutes of fighting there would be dead Americans and

Vietnamese but nothing was won. The jungles were so heavily booby trapped that many Americans lost their lives without being anywhere near an enemy soldier.

The Viet Cong was just one of the enemies that had to be fought. There was the heat, insects, snakes, disease, jungle rot, drugs, incompetence, confusion, fear and despair. There were the problems with the "lifers," the professional soldiers trying to fight a new war in the old way, the "juicers," those who avoided fighting and spent their time trying to make money by dealing on the black market, and the "grunts," the common fighting man. "Platoon" shows all of this in highly-detailed fashion.

There are two sergeants in Taylor's platoon who personify two attitudes toward the war. Sgt. Barnes (Tom Berenger) is the classic warrior — brave, tough, heroic and dedicated to the cause. Barnes likes to kill. Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe) is also brave, tough and heroic but he

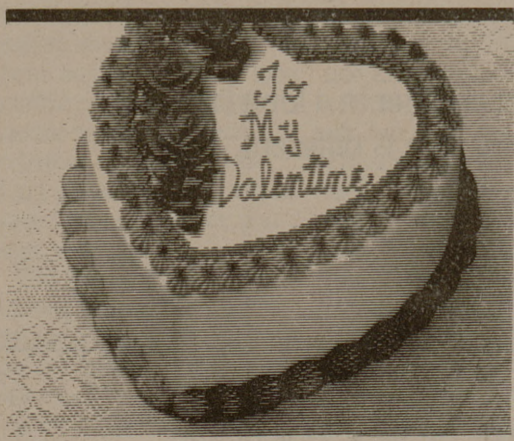
has a conscience. Elias kills only when it is necessary. Despite the fact there is an officer in charge, the sergeants are the true leaders of the platoon. Taylor admires both men.

The two sergeants come into conflict when the platoon comes to a village suspected of harboring Viet Cong soldiers. They come to blows and the conflict results in the deaths of both men by the end of the film.

"Platoon" is the best film that has been made about Vietnam. It works so well because it incorporates many of the images of the war that have been burned into our memory due to television and photographs. For those who remember the war, "Platoon" stirs up memories that have been buried for too long. For those too young to remember the war, "Platoon" offers a personal look at the war that has to be understood on a personal level.

—Review by Karl Pallmeyer

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