



The Boys in Company C (above and below), about five young Marines from boot camp to combat.



(more?) in the treatment of Viet Nam and bought the script. After forking over the asking price, Coppola immediately began rewriting, to such an extent that Millus, once Coppola's good friend, is now barely on speaking terms with the older director.

It's widely agreed that *Apocalypse Now* is based on Joseph Conrad's brilliant novel, *Heart of Darkness*, but one reader of the Milius/Coppola script calls that bunk — intellectual posturing by sycophants who wouldn't read Conrad anymore than they'd thank their agents. However, certain similarities do exist.

"We came upon a man of war anchored off the coast," wrote Conrad; Coppola's man of war is anchored on a Viet Nam river, skippered by a captain also named Kurtz (played by Marlon Brando), who sails up the river into the heart of darkness and tries to 'tame the natives' through perversity and violence. Kurtz's mission becomes para-military and eventually the high command sends up another war-lord, played by Martin Sheen, to terminate Kurtz.

Apocalypse Now was originally bankrolled by United Artists for a tidy \$8 million dollars. Conservative estimates now put the film at \$25.5 million, making it the most expensively budgeted in movie history. Monsoon rains, hurricanes and other natural disasters, along with bruised egos and Martin Sheen's heart attack, contributed to the film's lengthy, debilitating schedule. Coppola lost forty pounds; reorganized his film company; mortgaged everything he owns or may own, including future percentages of *The Godfather I* and *II*; and according to sources on the film, went through some of the same horrific changes as Conrad's Kurtz. Coppola is in fact so aware of the public fascination with the situation surrounding *Apocalypse Now* (can that fascination be translated into box-office dollars?) that he issued an official memo ordering his employees not to talk to the press.

In one of the few public statements Coppola has issued about the film, he says tersely, "I'm cauterizing old wounds. Trying to let people put the war behind them. You can never do that by forgetting."

So filmmakers would like us to be past forgetting. Jane Fonda is another member of the let's-think-about-it-first brigade. Her upcoming film, *Coming Home*, due for release in January, takes a look at returning Vets and what the war did to the psyches of men and women. Written by Waldo Salt (*Midnight Cowboy*) and directed by Hal Ashby (*Bound for Glory*), *Coming Home* is the story of a woman married to a Marine Viet Nam vet (Bruce Dern) who falls in love with a paraplegic (Jon Voight). Her Marine husband, unable to come to grips with the contradictory information about heroism, manliness and the war, chooses suicide as an alternative.

Jane sees the film as a strong statement about the war, fatigue and personal commitment. She also sees it as a truly feminist film. "The part I play is a conservative, male-defined Marine officer's wife. She married her ex-football player



when she was just out of high school. She views the whole world through his eyes, but then she begins to go through some changes. Now, there are millions and millions of women just like her. And if we can begin to show her the way she really is, she can be a kind of heroine."

Viet Nam vets may have been heroes, but to themselves and the rest of the country, they were psychologically scarred victims at best. *Coming Home* deals with that torture; so does John Milius' ode to Sixties friendships, *Big Wednesday*. The ironically titled *Heroes* with Henry Winkler also shows a mind-damaged veteran.

The Deer Hunter, with Robert De Niro, filters back and forth between the war zone and the home-front; *The Boys in Company C* and *Go Tell the Spartans* both deal directly with soldiers during the heat of battle. *Dog Soldiers* takes the drug scene in Viet Nam stateside and shows a group of vets dealing the hard stuff.

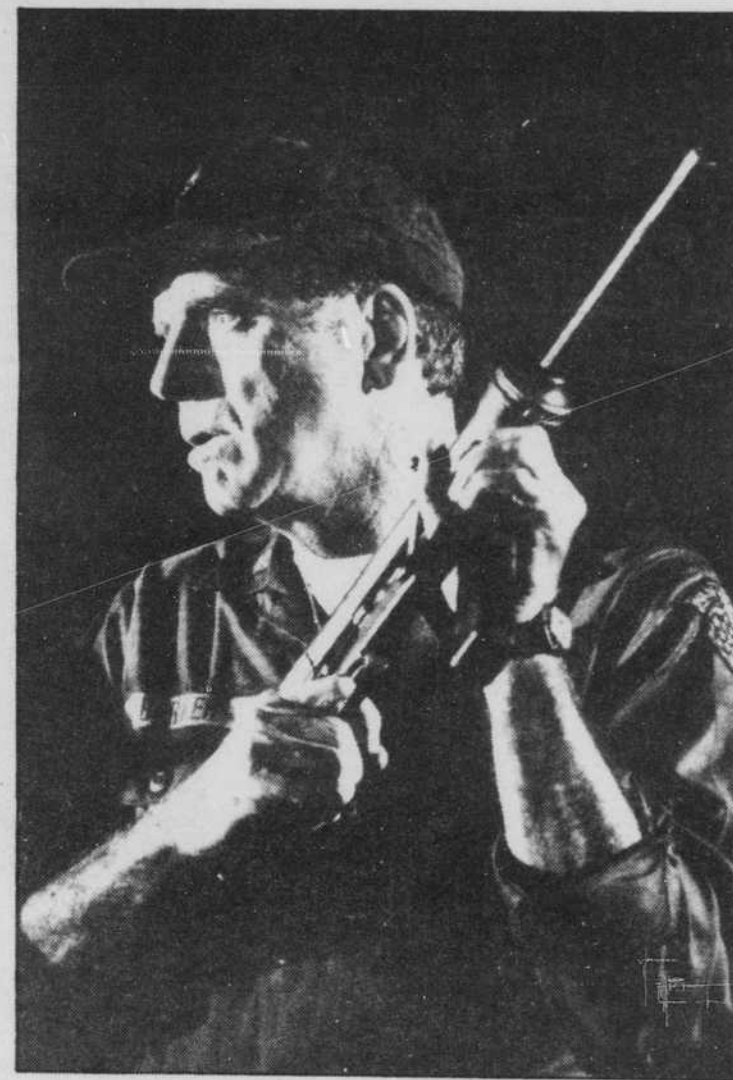
To be sure, World War II produced a fair share of films about war's tragic aftermath, including the highly regarded *Best Years Of Our Lives*, *Home of the Brave*, and *The Men*. But the overall message of those movies was optimism, the American spirit triumphant against all odds. With World War II, when all else failed, a viewing of the concentration camps put everything back into perspective. But it's impossible to put the egos, miscalculations and greed of the American military industrial complex to that same use.

The Deer Hunter, *Boys in Company C*, *Go Tell the Spartans*, *Coming Home* and the *Dog Soldiers* have been condemned by the State Department and the Defense Department. These two government agencies insist producers only want to show the "unattractive side of Viet Nam, the inflated drug scene; the mundane chore of saving Viet Nameese lives, the things men went through day in and day out, wasn't very appealing."

It's a grim thought, but the Defense department may be right. There's an uncomfortable feeling surrounding some of the Viet Nam films that smacks of exploitation. These films may indeed be the strong political statements needed to balance the war, or they may be nothing more than potboilers designed to show off violence, like the reprehensible *Rolling Thunder*, which used a Viet Nam vet as a vehicle for uncivilized destruction.

War movies have traditionally pleased everyone: studios, audiences, even the State Department. Our government readily concedes World War II would have been even harder to fight without the support of Hollywood through training films, propaganda movies and just good old morale boosters. Films like the *Sands of Iwo Jima* and *They Were Expendable* have even been cited as recruiting tools. It's doubtful *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Coming Home* will serve the same purpose. The closest we're going to get to flag waving is Coppola's statement that his film "is honest, pro-human and therefore pro-American."

Considering the trauma of Viet Nam, no one should expect more.



The *Deer Hunter* stars Robert De Niro (top photo, in jeep, wearing beret); Burt Lancaster heads cast of *Go Tell the Spartans* (above and below).

