

# TIM HUTTON

## America's Best Young Actor?

BY BYRON LAURSEN

In real life, Tim Hutton is equally as complex as Conrad Jarrett, (his character in 1980's multiple Oscar-winner, *Ordinary People*), a guy who looked like he'd sucked an electrified nipple. But Hutton's real-life complexity is benevolent. He's a mix of talents, all of which he loves to put into play. A good shooting guard, if NBA-undersized at six feet and 150 pounds, he even offered his services to the Ampersand Avengers city league team (currently in a building year). A capable jazz and rock drummer, he and old high school friends love to jam on tunes as demanding as "Round Midnight." A child of divorce, he seems to hold both parents in high admiration. Typically cast as a troubled youth, he can evoke compassion like no one else in the business. Nonetheless his existence is strictly enviable: a new electric red Porsche 911SC, a sumptuous Malibu Colony beach house, a brand new Oscar and Golden Globe Award, no shortage of female attention, a prestigious new film just hitting the screens.

The Stones sing "I'm just sitting on a fence" when I step into Hutton's recreational vehicle dressing room at 11 a.m. on a moody-skied day early last June. Hutton is between takes for *Taps*, his second feature film, a shared star billing with the formidable George C. Scott. In cadet-style trousers with a

sideseam stripe, Hutton also wears a t-shirt and is smoking the last cigarette from a pack.

"You don't smoke, do ya?" he asks. The question is a cue for his press agent, who has been recumbent on a naugahyde bench. He slumps dutifully over to the vehicle's aluminum door. An impish grin overtakes Hutton, who was trying to play the scene coolly. "Merit... Marlboro... anything but menthol," he instructs, and the press agent vanishes.

*Taps* is set at Valley Forge Military Academy, three hundred acres of rolling, sloping, rural Pennsylvania with over forty buildings, mostly Georgian brick-and-column stalwarts. Oppressive or inspirational depending on one's feelings about the military, the campus is a perfect setting for a story about someone trapped by the momentum of tradition. Hutton's Brian Moreland character is just that: a model cadet, he nearly worships Scott's character, the general in charge of the academy and its program of breeding staunch leaders. Trying, in a crisis, to act as he imagines Scott would, Hutton turns the Academy into a battleground and the line between make-believe and real war is crossed by the treads of a tank. Though only

*Obsessive, upright cadet Hutton (left and below) uses firepower to take over a military academy. The fancy dress soldiers, Tom Cruise and Sean Penn (center), are two of his accomplices.*

time will tell about popular acceptance, *Taps* has the makings of a classic coming-of-age story. And, in Hutton, it has one of the best young actors in several years, someone who does copious research and who tries to assume characters from the inside out.

The class he showed in *Ordinary People* is more than continued in this film," director Stanley Becker told me a few minutes earlier, behind some rigged-for-explosion scenery in the Academy's armory building. "*Taps* lives or falls on Timothy Hutton, he's the lifeblood, the key performance."

Hutton is pleased by the director's remarks when I relay them. He nods respectfully, but isn't anxious to dwell on himself as subject. Instead, he fumbles for a book he's been reading, one of those list-books, which are to literature what the medfly is to agriculture. In a list of the "Twenty Greatest Rock Albums of All Time" Hutton is perplexed by number 14.

"Let me just find this," he says, scrambling through the pages. "It's really important." The right page reveals itself. "Here... The Velvet Underground with Nico... I've never heard of them!"

In 1966, when the Velvet Underground was a brand new band and inspiring reviews like "an assemblage that actually vibrates with menace, cynicism and perversion" (*Chicago Daily News*), Tim Hutton was only six years old. His father, Jim Hutton, was a

