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Outrageous Military Conduct

**OPINIONATED
JUDGE**

BY JUDGE
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the facts), and with scores of survivors, to show their common elements. The film also establishes up front that all its statistics -- clearly and helpfully presented -- come from U.S. military records, though I learned at the screening I first attended that the filmmakers

assailants who are married), their assailants suffer no more than a slap on the wrist; fewer than 10 percent are ever criminally charged, and almost never with a felony.

The third reason to see the film is that it is such an instructive example of persistent

Why you should care about 'The Invisible War'

If you've been reading this column or my blog for long, you know there's a high likelihood that I am going to recommend that you watch a film depicting some type of oppression or suffering. In fact, although I occasionally do recommend lighter fare, my list of the best films of 2012 is all pretty heavy stuff. What's the point of watching such stories? I'll do my best to explain that as I recommend the 9th film on my 2012 list, "The Invisible War," an Oscar-nominated documentary about the systemic problem of sexual assaults in the U.S. military.

It's a mark of oppression that conduct that has affected so many people can have remained so invisible. As the film exposes, institutional corruption has made sexual assault within the U.S. military a rampant problem for decades, even while military leaders have claimed "zero tolerance."

Although the documentary focuses most of its attention on about eight survivors, it includes interviews with scores of veterans whose stories share any number of characteristics: Most of the assaults were accomplished by a superior officer and involved the use of force; none of the survivors had recourse to an impartial justice system; none received adequate emotional or physical care; nearly all the survivors lost military careers in which they were deeply invested; hardly any of the perpetrators were punished, and, indeed, many have advanced in their careers.

The examples are outrageous and horrifying, and watching the survivors and their loved ones recount their stories can be hard-going. But the first reason for doing so is that these survivors have endured these experiences in such isolation. Many, perhaps most, suffered repercussions for speaking out; they were instructed to suck it up or were out-and-out threatened; their files were "lost" or their cases closed for lack of evidence (their testimony and their injuries viewed as insufficient). Many have attempted suicide and most suffer from some form of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

The film is constructed so as to give the victims an audience, and these survivors, whose names are not likely ever to be listed



A frame from the documentary 'The Invisible War,' a movie depicting an epidemic of sexual assaults against women in the Armed Forces and the systemic cover-up of rape and other crimes by superior officers.

on a monument applauding them for what they endured, certainly deserve one.

The second reason for watching the film is that it is such a well-crafted and instructive piece of activism. As the film unfolds, it becomes clear that director Kirby Dick had good reason to expect intense resistance to the story he seeks to tell, because the problem of sexual assaults in the military has persisted, un-redressed, for decades.

Dick uses not only statistics, but edits interviews with military officials (many of who minimize or completely mischaracterize

had to hire a statistician to sort through those statistics because they are reported in such a deliberately opaque manner.

What we learn, among other things, is that an astounding 20 percent of females in the military have reported being assaulted, and that an estimated 80 percent of victims don't report the crimes against them. While many of the victims ended up being involuntarily discharged (often after having their trauma diagnosed as a personality disorder or having been charged with conduct unbecoming an officer or adultery, though it is usually the

institutional oppression. One of the most obvious problems is that these incidents are handled through the military justice system (so-called), which creates serious conflicts of interest for those charged with responding to complaints.

Indeed, until very recently (and then, in response to this film), in an estimated 25 percent of cases, the assailant was the person to whom the victim was supposed to report and, in another 30 percent of cases, the victim

continued ▼ on page 17