

Reviewer makes Hamburger Helper out of *Hamburger Hill*

by mike horvath

staff writer

Hamburger Hill is the latest addition to a growing list of movies that attempt to realistically depict the Vietnam War. It is kind of nice, I suppose, to go to a film and see what war is about without ever having to fight in one.

It is especially nice if you see this movie, a graphic presentation of fighting in the Ashau Valley during 1969. I say it is nice only because you are subjected to it for two hours. Any longer would make Ollie North a pacifist.

The film centers on what Army logistics simply called "Hill 937", a mound of dirt, mud and jungle near the Laotian border that served as the site for one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

It also follows fourteen men in the 101st Airborne Division who have to fight that battle, portraying all as cogs in a gigantic bureaucratic war machine whose purpose was misguided, heavy handed, and in director John Irvin's final analysis, ultimately wrong.

Irvin shows, at great length, the problems fac-

ed by the soldiers both in battle and within ranks. Personal and racial disputes resulting from battle tension and fatigue are numerous, but also expected.

Script writer John Casabatos (of *Heartbreak Ridge* fame) makes the characters personable from an impersonal level, illustrating the fear resulting from fighting a kind of ubiquitous enemy that most of the time could not be seen at all.

Irvin filmed documentaries on the war during the 1960's for the BBC, so he possesses a pretty good idea of the graphic

violence inherent to battle. This quality has carried over to his film making with grisly perfection. The battle scenes here are in a word, horrific.

You want realism? You got it. People are killed, maimed, and otherwise blown to pieces with increasing regularity. The action here rivals the best scenes in *Platoon*, with less emphasis on dramatic tension in favor of pure firepower.

There are some problems, however, mainly concerning the plot and characters. Perhaps Casabatos decided realism meant little, if any,

storyline. If that is the case, it is all right. Life does not have a script any more than war does, but a film should have basic elements that set the framework for the story.

Here, they are few and far between. Casabatos instead uses the story for sermonizing, attacking every major issue, from the press, to the "long hairs", to the strained set of moral and political values that plagued U.S. involvement at every angle.

As for characters, forget it. The ensemble cast, featuring Anthony Barille, Dylan McDermott, and

Tommy Swerdlow, look enough alike to be family. When names and faces are finally connected, the bodies are either in bags or resting comfortably in an evac hospital.

A movie like *Hamburger Hill* usually gets some negative reaction from either side or both sides of the left and right ideology. In this case, though, the movie takes neither the liberal nor conservative point of view.

It takes, rather, a very practical one: This is what Vietnam was like; it should never happen again.

TURNTABLE

The Silencers

A Letter From St. Paul
RCA

The attempt to merge intelligent lyrics with strong musicianship has always been a difficult task to pull off.

Many bands have tried it before and either end up with mixed results or with nothing at all.

But The Silencers, a four-man band from Scotland, have found the secret to success. The end results are spectacular.

The key for making it work is emotion. Emotion in the music and emotion in the words make this LP a excellent fusion of rock, folk, jazz and blues com-

bined with great examples of songwriting.

This unique experience begins with the opening number, *Painted Moon*, a bluesy statement on the Falkland Islands war of 1982. This keeps the pace for the entire album, there's no such thing as

a scathing attack on war in *God's Gift, Blue's Desire*, which is about conviction and belief, and the deeply-moving *I Can't Cry*.

Throughout, the band's talent as musicians create a lush sound which makes each tune memorable.

If that isn't enough, the inscription on the liner notes gives thanks to



filler here.

"Elvis Aaron Presley.

Other selections include

by gary beaudry

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