

Screen: 'Green Berets' as Viewed by John Wayne

War Movie Arrives at the Warner Theater

THE GREEN BERETS, screenplay by James Lee Barrett, based on the novel by Robin Moore; directed by John Wayne and Ray Kellogg; produced by Michael Wayne; a Baffac Production, presented by Warner Bros.-Seven Arts. At the Warner Theater, Broadway at 47th Street. Running time: 141 minutes.

Col. Mike Kirby	John Wayne
George Beckworth	David Janssen
Sergeant Petersen	Jim Hutton
Sergeant Muldoon	Aldo Ray
Doc McGee	Raymond St. Jacques
Colonel Morgan	Bruce Cabot
Colonel Cai	Jack Soo
Captain Nim	George Takei
Jamison	Patrick Wayne
Sergeant Provo	Luke Askew
Lin	Irene Tsu

By RENATA ADLER

"THE GREEN BERETS" is a film so unspeakable, so stupid, so rotten and false in every detail that it passes through being fun, through being funny, through being camp, through everything and becomes an invitation to grieve, not for our soldiers or for Vietnam (the film could not be more false or do a greater disservice to either of them) but for what has happened to the fantasy-making apparatus in this country. Simplicities of the right, simplicities of the left, but this one is beyond the possible. It is vile and insane. On top of that, it is dull.

The film, directed by John Wayne and nominally based on a novel by Robin Moore has no hero. It is vaguely about some Green Berets, led by John Wayne, trying to persuade Wayne's idea of a liberal journalist (David Janssen) that this war is a fine thing for Vietnam and for America. The movie has human props taken from every war film ever made: a parachute jump; an idea of Vietcong soldiers, in luxury, uniform, champagne and caviar, apparently based on the German high command; a little Asian orphan named Hamchuck, pronounced Hamchuck but more like Upchuck than anything; battle scenes somewhere between "The Red Badge of Courage" and "The Dirty Dozen"; a dying dog.

There is inadvertent humor in a hysterically boring way. "He's dying," a Negro medic says, thoughtfully spooning Jim Beam bourbon down the throat of an elderly Oriental. "Poor old thing can't even keep his rice down any more." What is clearly an Indian extra in a loin cloth somehow straggles in among the montagnards. A Vietcong general is dragged from a bed of sin (which, through an indescribable inanity of the plot, the Green Berets have contrived for him) with his trousers on. He is subsequently drugged and yanked off into the sky on a string dangling from a helicopter. A Green Beret points out to the journalist some American-made punji sticks (the movie is obsessed with punji sticks): "Yup," the Green Beret says, "it's a little trick we learned from Charlie. But we don't dip them in the same stuff he does."



John Wayne, who co-directed the film, as a Special Forces colonel in "The Green Berets"

What the movie is into is another thing entirely. What is sick, what is an outrage and a travesty is that while it is meant to be an argument against war opposition—while it keeps reiterating its own line at every step, much as soap operas keep recapitulating their plots—it seems so totally impervious to any of the questions that it raises. It is so full of its own caricature of patriotism that it cannot even find the right things to falsify. No acting, no direction, no writing, no authenticity, of course, But it is worse. It is completely incommunicado, out of touch. It trips something that would outrage any human sensibility, like mines, at every step and staggers on.

The first Green Beret comes on speaking German, to show his versatility in languages. When the VC have just been sprayed with flames, a Green Beret is asked about his apparent affinity for this kind of thing. "When I was a kid," he says modestly, "my dad gave me a chemistry set. And it got bigger than both of us." When the VC, nonetheless, win the Special Forces camp in hand-to-hand combat, a soldier calls in air support. "It'll only take a minute," he says, like a dentist, as the VC are mowed down from the air. The journalist, "the former skeptic about the war," the press kit synopsis chooses to say at this point, "leaves to write about the heroic exploits of the American and South Vietnamese forces."

The point is that Wayne is using spoken German, lumatic chemistry sets, machine killing of men who have won fairly hand-to-hand, without apparently noticing that this is not exactly the stuff of which heroic fantasies are made. This is crazy. If the left-wing extremist's nightmare of what we already are has become the right-wing extremist's ideal of what we ought to be we are in steeper trouble than anyone could have imagined. The movie opened yesterday at the Warner Theater.