

Film Review

FULL METAL JACKET

Jonathan Lighter

James Jones, who'd fought on Guadalcanal and later wrote the novel *The Thin Red Line* (1962) about it, believed that "The true test of a true anti-war film is whether or not it shows that modern war destroys human character."¹ In that case, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (*FMJ*) more than qualifies. But while it is a deadpan Swiftian satire of war and the military, it also suggests that "human character" isn't much to begin with. It mocks platitudes about the "dignity of man" and the essential goodness of the human race. Its disgust with war becomes an implicit assault on the claims of "civilization." It is a strange and ugly film occasioned by a strange and ugly war, and up until the climactic firefight, Kubrick and his co-writers, Vietnam journalists Michael Herr and Gustav Hasford, keep the emotional temperature hovering around zero.

It's an unconventional film. *FMJ*'s bifurcated form, essential plotlessness, minimal characterizations, and unresolved conclusion led to chilly notices from leading critics like Stanley Kauffmann ("trite") and Pauline Kael ("possibly Kubrick's worst movie"). But generous praise was also forthcoming. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times*, for one, found it a "film of immense and very rare imagination."²

Kubrick reportedly discovered the phrase "full metal jacket" in a firearm catalog and thought it would make a fitting title for his filming of *The Short-Timers*, veteran Gustav Hasford's vehement, hyperbolic, and surreal, 1979 novel about Marines in Vietnam.³ A "full metal jacket" is simply a bullet casing, but since much of the film is about training for war, the phrase suggests

qualities needed to encase the soft civilian selves of recruits before they're sent to destroy – or be destroyed by – a proficient enemy.

FMJ is Kubrick's eleventh film and his final statement on war and society. Of three earlier successful war-themed films, only the sentimentalized Roman-era blockbuster *Spartacus* (1960) finds anything admirable in war, namely the traditional values of loyalty and self-sacrifice in a noble if hopeless cause. (No one forgets "I am Spartacus!") In stark contrast the masterly *Paths of Glory* (1957) focuses on the hypocrisy and ambition of French officers in the First World War. An even broader distrust of leadership – civilian as well as military – propels Kubrick's darkly comic *Doctor Strangelove* (1964), in which madness and incompetence culminate in nuclear apocalypse. But in *Full Metal Jacket* Kubrick turns to scrutinizing the rank and file as moral agents, and he displays little of the sympathy for them that makes *Paths of Glory* a powerful antiwar statement.⁴

FMJ is far chillier and more demanding than those previous films. The liberal ideal of respect for the individual necessarily gets the ax from the military during the opening credits, as faceless barbers shave young men's heads, obliterating individuality, the first step in claiming the title of United States Marines.⁵

As shorn locks litter the floor, Johnnie Wright twangs the C&W hit, "Hello, Vietnam." It conveys the faith in US policy and the domino theory that most teenage volunteers in 1966-67 presumably felt:

Goodbye, my sweetheart; hello, Vietnam....
We must stop communism in that land,
Or freedom will start slipping through our hands.

Next, in the confines of a spotless squad bay, and in violent contrast to the ingenuousness of the song, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman (R. Lee Ermey, in a turn that made him a Marine icon) now starts to rewire the psyches of his platoon of dumbfounded trainees. Hartman belligerently ridicules their human worth, civilian taboos, civilized ways of thinking, and whatever dignity these “pukes” and “maggots” think they have left. The whole process is an initiatory ordeal like those of primal societies, by which young men are turned into warriors, and no movie more effectively represents the military as a self-contained community whose warrior values are drastically opposed to those of civilized life. All we ever know of Hartman is his absolute allegiance to the Corps and to his function as trainer, humiliator, tormentor, and indoctrinator, and his mostly blank-faced recruits are perfect material to work on. Unlike troops in other movies and the singer of “Hello, Vietnam,” they lack – so far as *FMJ* is concerned – sweethearts, families, friends, interests, pasts, goals, ideas, and ideals. To that extent, they’re caricatures too: completely blank slates. Only the newly nicknamed “Private Joker” (a bespectacled Matthew Modine, the eventual protagonist) shows intelligence; but except for one time when Joker impresses Hartman with his savvy and nerve, it’s mainly a smug verbal facility. Hartman exists solely to turn empty vessels into loaded weapons ready to kill and be killed, because it takes proficient killers to win wars. After the societally ordained stripping of individuality, that’s Kubrick’s indisputable second charge against humanity.⁶

Kubrick’s streamlined evocation of training is a riveting and emotionally resonant picture, and *FMJ* captures the immersive shock (though few of the details) of Marine Corps boot camp. Vietnam-era Marines find the film’s first act not just sufficiently realistic but also very funny, unlike some unprepared audiences, who are (or were in 1987) often stunned by Ermey’s *tour-de-force* of probably unprecedented and sometimes surreal verbal obscenity. (“You had

best unfuck yourself or I will unscrew your head and shit down your neck!" ... "I will *motivate* you, Private Pyle, if it *short-dicks* every *cannibal* in the *Congo!*")

Hartman is one of the most vivid one-dimensional characters on film: he makes sixty years of tough-guy sergeants like Lon Chaney, John Wayne, Jack Webb, Darren McGavin, and Louis Gossett, Jr. look like high-school guidance counselors.⁷ Erme, a Vietnam veteran and former drill instructor himself, cranks up, concentrates, and perfects a regime of insults and officially outlawed slaps and punches that weren't terribly unusual in Indoctrination Phase in the 1960s. (No level of pressure, bullying, and stress in training, however, matches the intensity of battle or capture, which are exactly what the trainees are being conditioned for.)

Hartman's special ire is reserved for one Private Lawrence, whom he dubs "Gomer Pyle" after the inept caricature Marine in the CBS sitcom of that name. Pyle (Vincent D'Onofrio) begins as an oversized but cherubic Rousseauian innocent who can't help smiling at Hartman's creatively obscene rages (and is made to pay for it instantly) and who needs Joker to teach him to button his shirt and tie his shoelaces properly. He can't run, he can't scale obstacles, he can't swing from ropes. When Hartman finds a jelly doughnut the "disgusting fatbody" Pyle has smuggled into barracks, he punishes the rest of the platoon. The upshot and turning point is a midnight "blanket party," in which the platoon – including Joker, Pyle's "only friend" – pay him back by tying him down and beating him severely with bars of soap.⁸

Pyle may win our sympathy as a hapless victim: no way will he succeed in this mad laboratory of abuse, instant obedience, and relentless conditioning. But the worm turns. You see it in Pyle's face when Hartman exhorts his charges to become crack US Marine marksmen like mass murderer Charles Whitman and presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald (another slap at civilized values: no idealism or patriotism here). Pyle's look becomes a little more crazily intense

when he stands with the platoon as it chants "Kill! Kill! Kill! ... Blood! Blood! Blood!" He starts shaping up. Soon he's an expert in the manual of arms. He's amazing on the rifle range. "Private Pyle," Hartman says. "You are definitely born again hard," the highest compliment he can give. (The transformation, of course, is too sudden and too pat to be taken seriously: in reality, Pyle would have been recycled to a Physical Conditioning Platoon long before.)

On graduation day, Hartman parades with his now impeccable platoon to the strains of "The Marines Hymn" and in voiceover mystically intones,

Today, you people are no longer maggots. Today, you are *Marines*. You're part of a brotherhood. From now on *until the day you die*, wherever you are, every Marine is your brother. Most of you will go to Vietnam. Some of you will not come back. But always remember this: Marines die. That's what we're here for. But the Marine Corps lives forever. And that means YOU live forever.

Having promised at the start to turn his boyish neophytes into "minister[s] of death, praying for war," Hartman has already explained just why the "Marine Corps lives forever": "God has a hard-on for Marines, because we kill everything we see! ... To show our appreciation for so much power, we keep heaven packed with fresh souls!"⁹ Though inspired by the Marines' exceptional *esprit de corps*, none of these claims makes sense except as religious faith: Hartman himself is a minister of death in a shadow religion concocted unconsciously by "civilized" societies largely oblivious to its existence. So does the military represent service, national defense, and good citizenship, as advertised, or is its existence chiefly to mold young men to kill on command? *FMJ* holds with the latter, exclusively.

With graduation, the rebirth of a gaggle of blank-slate civilians as disciplined but still vacuous Marines, devotees of Ares in a darker, parallel society, is complete. Their job is to accept

death and dish it out.

And on graduation night, Joker finds Pyle in the head, clearly out of his mind with a loaded M-14. He's going to blow his own brains out, but Hartman's sudden appearance allows him first to kill the man who's turned him through torment into a real Marine. By killing himself, he bloodily rejects this new identity, so antithetical to who he was, declaring angrily that he lives "in a world of shit." As Act One ends, Joker just stares at the carnage – as, perhaps, do we.¹⁰

Joker makes an unappealing lead, an unlikable, detached wise guy whose schtick is sarcasm. Like the other characters, he has no human attachments and begins with no virtuous ideals. He smugly mocks boot camp as an "eight-week college for the phony-tough and the crazy-brave," as though that doesn't include him. Joker later tells reporters with even greater cockiness that he wants to be the "first kid on my block to score a confirmed kill." At different points in the film the phony-tough Joker talks like John Wayne, shouts he joined the Marines "to kill," and later lies to tentmates about having been "in the shit." Forced to man a machine gun during an NVA attack, he honestly says, "I ain't ready for this shit."

From the narrative hysteria of the murder-suicide, Kubrick jumps us headfirst into Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam. As a Vietnamese hooker sashays down the street, the soundtrack is blasting "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'." Joker, like Gustav Hasford, is now a Marine journalist assigned to *Stars and Stripes*. Kubrick's opinion of South Vietnam is as jaundiced as his take on the Marines. South Vietnam is sleazy, alien, parasitic, violent, shocking. The city of Da Nang is garish with billboards; Hué during the battle is rubble and blazing buildings, and the only Vietnamese of consequence that we see before the film's climax are a pair of brazen camera thieves, a soldier pimp, and a couple of semi-comical whores. Joker's photographer Rafter Man complains, "We're supposed to be helping them, and they shit all over us every chance they get."

Vietnamese extras include an endless line of refugees in the background and a dozen or so farmers blown away in a free-fire zone by a kill-crazy helicopter gunner. ("Ain't war hell? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!")¹¹

To Joker, smiling as usual when he asks the gunner how he can kill women and children, it's all mildly amusing. Even at his most serious, contemplating the discovery of a mass grave of civilians murdered by the Communists in Hué, his reaction is cold and meaningless: "The dead know only one thing: it is better to be alive." Thematically more important than Joker's aloofness, however, is the barbarousness of both sides.

Joker's meeting with a dimwitted, cartoon colonel right afterward is central. The colonel threatens to punish him for wearing a peace button with a far larger "Born to Kill" inked onto his helmet cover – suggesting perhaps that the desire for peace is less than the need to kill. "Is this," the colonel wants to know, "some kind of *joke*?" Not at all: "It's about the duality of man. The Jungian thing, sir." The "duality of man" is *FMJ*'s central theme. The colonel understands the reference to the "Jungian thing" no more than most of the audience; he makes a few senseless remarks before declaring pricelessly that "[w]e are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out."¹²

Sent to Phu Bai near Hué City for repeatedly needling his propagandist editor, Joker and Rafter Man (who wants to "get some trigger time") link up with the self-named "Lust Hog Squad" of real combat Marines. Prominent among them is a hulking, multi-bandoliered machine gunner, a creature of the battlefield, curiously named Animal Mother. Animal (Adam Baldwin) walks right up to new-guy Joker and affably promises to "tear [him] a new asshole." His sort-of-buddy, Eightball, assures the newcomer that "Under fire, Animal Mother is one of the finest human beings in the world." A sneering bully, a racist, a misogynist, and a sadist, he personifies another

of James Jones's observations from World War II: "[A] vicious, cruel, shrewdly functioning Animal ... is your really superior combat soldier." Animal has strong feelings about "freedom" as justification for the war:

You think we waste gooks for *freedom*? This is a slaughter. If I'm gonna get my balls blown off for a word ... my word is "poontang."

Sizing up a dead squad member, he plainly enunciates the most common unuttered thought in a war zone: "Better you than me." *His* helmet cover (via J. Robert Oppenheimer) says, "I Am Become Death." Animal Mother is a walking, talking Jungian "shadow"—selfish, aggressive, lustful, and violent but in the right circumstances apt to take positive action impetuously – which he later does.

The squad's more conventional members (Cowboy, Eightball, Doc Jay) exist primarily to keep things moving. More interesting are weirdos like Hand Job, named for masturbating "ten times a day," and the scary visionary Crazy Earl (Kieron Jecchinis) who buddies up with the corpse of a North Vietnamese soldier and explains wide-eyed in disjointed, prophetic tones:

I love the little Commie bastards, man, I really do. ... These are great days we're living, bros! We are jolly green giants, walking the earth with guns. These people we wasted here today are the finest human beings we will ever know. After we rotate back to the world, we're gonna miss not having anyone around that's worth shooting.

That's a take on the "joy of battle" worthy of Homer: those soft civilians at home, averse to war, not indoctrinated into the life of violence, aren't even worth shooting. As Hartman suggested, killing is, for his graduates, the real point of living, and "[T]he finest human beings" are

stone-cold killers like Animal Mother and the enemy. When a reporter asks Crazy Earl if America belongs in Vietnam, he answers emphatically: "I don't know. /belong in Vietnam. I'll tell you that." His look of happy surprise after killing a couple of VC lights up the screen as the soundtrack suddenly blares the rockin' "Surfin' Bird," among the most vacuous lyrics ever penned, as medevacs land to pick up US casualties.¹³ Somehow, it's all perverse, nihilist fun.

The film nears its climax when the squad gets lost in the rubble-strewn streets of Hué City and comes under murderous sniper fire.¹⁴ Theatrical as it is, the whole excruciating segment is brilliantly staged and filmed. Caught in the open, Eightball and then Doc Jay are methodically shot again and again by a fantastically accurate marksman determined to lure the rest of the squad into the kill zone. Animal Mother furiously defies an order and rushes forward crazily, firing his M60. The dying Doc points to the sniper's location and then, along with Eightball, is ripped nearly in two. Cowboy, the NCO, is killed, and Animal Mother, temporarily indomitable (as Jung theorized the "shadow" could be) instead of merely monstrous, leads the survivors against the sniper's position. (Kubrick's use of lighting as the scene goes from daylight to darkness in this sequence is stunning.) The target building is crackling with fires, and the Marines come up behind the sniper while the soundtrack (by Kubrick's daughter Abigail Meade) creaks and clangs like dungeon doors. Joker's rifle jams, the sniper whirls around in slo-mo and is revealed, shockingly, to be a young girl of about fifteen with a Czech VZ.58 assault rifle. She fires wildly at the Marines but is shot down by Rafter Man. Joker can't take his eyes off her as she prays in Vietnamese and whispers "Shoot me!" in English. Animal Mother wants to "leave her for the mother-lovin' rats," but Joker, with surprising empathy, says they can't leave her to suffer. Animal, monstrous again, challenges Joker to "waste her": the "crazy-brave" confronting the "phony-tough." The camera zeros in on Joker's face as he discovers something new – inner

struggle. He stares interminably before pulling the trigger. Rafter Man whoops happily. Some have sentimentalized the girl sniper as a Vietnamese patriot murdered by American ogres; but her torture of the Marines makes her an ogre as well; as brutal and indifferent to life as anybody.¹⁵

She's a prize student of some Vietnamese Hartman – the man who told his platoon what "one motivated individual with a rifle can do" and "[i]t is the hard heart that kills." One doesn't expect such a young girl to have such a hard heart, but here it exemplifies the reach of militarism and an innate receptiveness to it regardless of cultural background. In war the lid of civilization is off, and *FMJ* as a whole asserts what Hartman's teaching implied: in a combat zone, the attributes of civilization are worth as little as the niceties of morality.

A final jump and the Marines are humping through a blazing hellscape singing, startlingly, the "Mickey Mouse Club March," a theme song from kids' TV. The combination of flames and children's lyrics suggest some kind of moronic apocalypse.¹⁶ If a battle line between good and evil runs through the human heart, these men don't even know a battle's going on. The Marines' chorusing of the kids' Mickey Mouse theme at the end of *Full Metal Jacket* (but not at the end of Hasford's novel) suggests, as a thematic device, a childlike obliviousness to the reality we see from outside, one they cannot see, much less understand. The singing is a mockery of the well-known optimistic conclusion of *The Red Badge of Courage*, literature's most iconic combat *Bildungsroman*: "He was a man."

Joker, again in voiceover, acknowledges in the film's final moments that like Private Pyle he too is in a "world of shit," though he's comforted by thoughts of future sex with an archetypal, sluttish "Mary Jane Rottencrotch," "happy" just to be "alive" and "not afraid." As he placidly observed on Parris Island, "The Marine Corps wants killers. ... indestructible men, men without

fear." No longer psychically detached, Joker is no longer an outside critic: he's a killer and thoroughly acculturated. He can no longer pretend he's not a participant in the world he is in. His gibes are done.

In *FMJ's* amoral universe, the horror is that there is no horror. The innocents never notice their loss of innocence – though in Jungian terms they were never totally "innocent" to begin with. Like Rafter Man, they're proud of being "heartbreakers and life-takers," night-stalkers and trash-talkers. As an epigraph to *The Short Timers*, Hasford quotes an opportune line from Thoreau: "Behold a Marine, ...a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity...."¹⁷ Thoreau wasn't thinking of a Jungian shadow, but writers Hasford, Herr, and Kubrick surely were. Like the other dimensionless characters, and despite his transient empathy for the dying girl, Joker is still just a "reminiscence" and a "shadow" of a human being, molded further by war and the military, which are the uncivilized shadow of civilization's ego-ideal. But while Jung's idea of the "shadow" covered the unacknowledged impulsivity and brutishness of the individual, Kubrick, Herr, and Hasford posit these things as a societal constant. Armies are the dark force of civilization, and their use is its manifestation.

In Cornel Wilde's World War II film, *Beach Red* (1967), Marine Captain McDonald (Wilde) implausibly tells his hardcase sergeant, "I don't want these boys to be professional killers!" But Joker, headed for Vietnam, says that's exactly what the Marines want. And it's exactly what the enemy wants. And both get them. Unlike the radical *FMJ*, *Beach Red* is squarely in the liberal tradition of Hollywood war movies: battle is horrific, even "too horrible for human beings," as Jack Webb says near the end of Lewis Milestone's *Halls of Montezuma* (1950); but if battles must be fought, Americans will use measured, appropriate violence only. These movies, like the public they were made for, took it for granted that ordinary "American boys" could never engage in

wanton slaughter, for example – a conviction traumatically upended with the revelation of the My Lai massacre in 1969. Hence Kubrick’s psychotic helicopter gunner joyfully killing civilians and their water buffaloes to rack up a body count.

Doc Jay quotes LBJ at one point, about not sending American boys, but of major Vietnam war films, *FMJ* is least concerned with Vietnam. *FMJ* is a dark, intense satire of modern war, and war itself is the definitive satire in action of professed ethics, wisdom, and decency. With Vietnam as its basis, *FMJ* reduces war to vulgar dialogue, brutal acts, nihilist attitudes, and ineffectual heroism and scores the organized brutality inseparable from civilization – which was the historical condition that gave rise to mass, disciplined standing armies. *Paths of Glory* conveyed humanist pity for war’s enlisted victims and rage at their corrupt officers. In *Full Metal Jacket*, however, Kubrick’s former rage and pity are replaced by pessimism, universal misanthropy, and exhaustion, for the evil that pervades the military also pervades humankind as a species.¹⁸

Jay Scott of the Toronto *Globe and Mail* called *Full Metal Jacket* possibly “the best war movie ever made”; and twenty years after its release, the *Army Times* selected *FMJ* as the “best war movie of... all time,” judging it to be “about as real as it comes without signing a contract.”¹⁹

Jonathan Lighter is Research Associate Professor of English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and has reviewed films for WLA since 2012. He edited the Historical Dictionary of American Slang for Random House, was the recipient of three NEH Research Grants, and taught English and Linguistics for twenty-five years at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He developed and taught an upper division course in war and literature for twelve semesters and is currently writing a book on the subject.

Notes

¹ "Phony War Films," *Saturday Evening Post* (Mar. 30, 1963), 64-67.

² Stanley Kauffmann, "Blank Cartridge," *The New Republic* (July 27, 1987) : <https://newrepublic.com/article/133778/blank-cartridge>; Pauline Kael, "Ponderoso," *New Yorker* (July 13, 1987) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1987/07/13/ponderoso>; "Kubrick's 'Full Metal Jacket,' on Vietnam," *New York Times* (June 26, 1987). <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/film/062687kubrick-jacket.html> (accessed Jan. 9, 2025).

³ Vincent Lobrutto, "The Written Word and the Very Visual Stanley Kubrick," in Geoffrey Cocks, James Diedrick, and Glenn Perusek, eds., *Depth of Field* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 47.

⁴ Kubrick's debut feature, the antiwar *Fear and Desire* (1952) was financially and artistically unsatisfactory, Kubrick later calling it "inept and pretentious" and a "bumbling amateur film exercise": John Baxter, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1997), 56.

⁵ Contrary to popular supposition, some ninety per cent of US Marines during the Vietnam war were volunteers: John Prados, "The Marines' Viet Nam Commitment," *US Naval Institute* (Apr. 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/vb9yzzxb> (Accessed Nov. 3, 2024).

⁶ Authority-enforced destruction of individuality is posited as the worst crime of all in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).

⁷ Starring in, respectively: *Tell It to the Marines* (1926), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *The D.I.*(1957), *The Tribe* (1970), *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982). Clint Eastwood, however, is his equal in sheer, if unrealistic, intimidation in the fanciful *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986).

⁸ In a review of William Mares's *The Marine Machine* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), one Marine colonel noted with approval the "raw brutality" of Marine training that civilian readers would find "shocking": A. A. Nelson, Jr., "Professional Reading," *Naval War College Review*, 23 (June 1971), 102. For accounts of boot camp in the 1960s, see also Herb Moore's *Rows of Corn* (Orangeburg, S.C.: Sandlapper, 1983) and W. D. Ehrhart's *Vietnam-Perkasie* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1983), 11-19. The title of Patrick Turley's memoir of post-Nine-Eleven Marine training sums up its contents: *Welcome to Hell* (Palisades, N.Y.: Chronology Books, 2012). These comparable accounts cover more than a half century.

⁹ Cf. the words of Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller, the most highly decorated of all US Marines, on his retirement in 1955: "Now, if you're Marine, you're all Marine. You'll put the Corps above your family, your country, even God and all else in some cases." Qtd. in Burke Davis, *Marine!* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), 371.

¹⁰ The episode is fantasy. Marines leave the base as soon as they graduate, so there's no graduation night in barracks. It's probably impossible to smuggle a rifle magazine off a Marine Corps firing range, as every round must be accounted for. And beyond that, all rifles have been turned in to the armory before graduation.

¹¹ The gunner's reply comes straight from Herr's *Dispatches* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1977) with the caveat that it was just a "famous story": "[S]ome reporters asked a door gunner, 'How can you shoot women and children?' and he'd answered, 'It's easy, you just don't lead 'em so much.' Well, they said you needed a sense of humor. ..." But cf. the saying, "If it's dead and Vietnamese, it's VC": Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (N.Y.: Holt, 1977), xx.

¹² In *The Short-Timers*, the colonel turns out to be a literal vampire, with a blood-drained Marine in the back of his vehicle. Herr, 226: "helmet graffiti... 'Born to Kill' placed in all innocence next to the peace symbol." And, of course, Jung's view of the "duality of man," the opposition of "persona" and "shadow" is more complex than Kubrick's explanation of it: "altruism and cooperation on one hand, and aggression and xenophobia on the other": Gene Siskel, "Candidly Kubrick," *Chicago Tribune* (June 21, 1987), III, 22. For a fully Jungian interpretation of the film, see "*Full Metal Jacket*. The Drama,

Burden and Moral Conflicts of Becoming More Conscious," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THoIEMuhhMI> (July 20, 2024) (accessed March 20, 2025).

¹³ The mass grave shows that the Communists find that Vietnamese civilians are indeed "worth killing," or at least executing.

¹⁴ Remarkably, *FMJ* was filmed entirely in England. (The palm trees were imported). Though specially demolished for the film, the wide-open spaces and three-story buildings of the disused Beckton gasworks near London don't look much like the narrow streets and predominantly low structures of the real Huế.

¹⁵ Reliable estimates of the number Vietnamese women who participated in active combat with the VC during the "American war" are not easily discovered, but "tens of thousands" appears to be a reasonable estimate. Most served as nurses and in support units. Very few in combat units could have been as young as fourteen or fifteen, and of those none were likely to be super-snipers.

¹⁶ *Mickey Mouse* was a period expression for pointless or annoying demands, regulations, etc., and Marines sometimes refer to themselves humorously as "Uncle Sam's Misguided Children."

¹⁷ "Civil Disobedience," 1849, in *A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-slavery and Reform Papers* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1866), 126; Thoreau specifically blames the "black arts" of the US government.

¹⁸ Interpretations differ. Samuel Fuller, the only director who'd been a rifleman on Omaha Beach, reportedly declared that "as far as he was concerned, it was just another goddamn recruiting film – that teenage boys who went to see Kubrick's picture with their girlfriends would come out thinking that wartime combat was neat": Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Cutting Heroes Down to Size," *Chicago Reader* (July 23, 1998)

<https://chicagoreader.com/film/cutting-heroes-down-to-size/> (accessed Nov. 22, 2024). And R. Lee Ermey told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "If I thought there was a hint of b--- s--- that was against the war in Vietnam, if I thought he was making an antiwar film, I would have had nothing to do with the thing": Peter Stack, "Kubrick's D.I. Is the Real Thing" (July 8, 1987), 46.

¹⁹ Jay Scott, "Kubrick's Triumph" (June 26, 1987), D-1; C. Mark Brinkley. "Our Top 10 Best Military Movies of All Time." *Army Times* (July 5, 2007) armytimes.com (accessed Feb. 9, 2020; now deleted). Brinkley had covered the US Marines in Afghanistan.