

# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[*Jarhead*]

### Silver Screen Semper Fi

By Steve Sailer

WAR MOVIES have been getting more stomach-churning over the decades, but that hasn't hurt recruiting. The more gore on the screen, the more boys want to prove they're man enough to take it. Although Marines have been dying in Iraq at a disproportionate rate, the manliest of all the services still hit its enlistment quota for fiscal year 2005, while the more feminized Army has struggled.

Former Marine Lance Corporal Anthony Swofford writes in *Jarhead*, his somewhat embroidered Desert Storm memoir about his love-hate relationships with war and his fellow warriors, "Vietnam war films are all pro-war, no matter what the supposed message, what Kubrick or Coppola or Stone intended."

Indeed, when "Apocalypse Now" was finally released in 1979 after years of hype about how it would be the ultimate antiwar movie, I noticed that all the most macho ROTC guys at my college were humming Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." Likewise, in this slow but often hilarious adaptation of Swofford's book, a theater full of Marines lustily sings along as Francis Ford Coppola's helicopters rain down death from above. Young soldiers, Swofford notes, are excited by war movies "because the magic brutality of the films celebrates

the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills."

The highly literary Swofford (played by Jake Gyllenhaal), whose favorite book is *The Stranger*, Camus's novel about shooting an Arab, kvetches amusingly, if endlessly, about the Kuwait war. Still, his biggest regret was that Iraq was defeated before he had time to kill anybody, which is definitely not a shortcoming of the current administration's Iraq War.

Liberal critics have excoriated "Jarhead" for not being antiwar enough, claiming that its lack of a political agenda makes it "pointless." If only "Jarhead" condemned the first George Bush's war, then the public would turn against the second George Bush's war! Or something. That the conflicts were opposite in origin and execution has escaped the notice of most reviewers.

Although neocon keyboard combatants like John Podhoretz have conversely denounced "Jarhead" as not pro-war enough, the film isn't likely to hurt the USMC's 2006 recruiting drive. It's not particularly bloody, but it may set a new low for vulgar language and gross-out humor. You wouldn't want "Jarhead's" Marines dating your daughter, but it's reassuring to learn that America still produces lads this lively.

As many irate Marines have protested, you should take Swofford's Desert Storm tales with a grain of sand. He appears to have embellished what he actually saw during his five months of waiting in Saudi Arabia and four days of fighting in Kuwait with decades of grunt lore, such as the popular legend about the unfaithful Marine's vengeful wife who mailed him a videotape of "The Deer Hunter." When he popped it in to show his buddies, they discovered she had spliced in a home movie of herself consorting with

the guy next door. Of course, in Swofford's punched-up version, the other Marines want to watch it again.

The screenplay by William Broyles Jr., author of two fine engineers-solving-problems scripts for Tom Hanks in "Apollo 13" and "Cast Away," thankfully tones down Swofford's Holden Caulfield-like self-pity and stresses his riotous dialogue. Broyles can't do much with the book's lack of a plot, so "Jarhead" ends up resembling a documentary on steroids more than a conventional movie.

Having been a Marine infantry officer in Vietnam, Broyles should be embarrassed, though, by his ridiculous live-fire training scene in which novice snipers supposedly must slither under machine gun fire only two feet off the ground, with predictably fatal results. (In reality, the trainer's gun is set so it can't fire lower than eight feet high.)

British stage director Sam Mendes, whose only previous films were the overrated "American Beauty" and the beautiful but ponderous "Road to Perdition," wasn't an obvious choice to film "Jarhead," but his English approach to acting pays off because the USMC is perhaps the most theatrical institution this side of the Atlantic. Marine sergeants are not sincerely inarticulate mumblerers in the Marlon Brando Method tradition. Instead, like British stage stars, drill instructors are the heirs to a rich heritage of tricks of the trade for creating larger-than-life personae.

Under Mendes's guidance, Jamie Fox, an Oscar-winner for "Ray," takes his hanging curveball role as the tough but caring sergeant, an obscenely eloquent yet religious family man who loves war, and pounds it out of the park. ■

Rated R for pervasive language, some violent images, and strong sexual content.

# Are We Blind?

## Can't We See What Is Happening To Us?

We are living way beyond our means and improperly using statistics that distort reality and misleadingly show that things are wonderful. We are importing more, producing less in American-owned factories, and selling off our irreplaceable wealth-producing companies and other assets to pay for imports and debt.

### Losing Ownership and Control Of Our Country

We are losing ownership and control of our country through unsustainable balance-of-trade deficits. In the last 10 years, we have lost \$3.0 Trillion through these trade deficits. \$1.3 Trillion has been returned and used by foreign companies to buy our best companies like Chrysler, Amoco, Atlantic Richfield Oil, and 8,600 other great companies. For example, key chokepoint industries like cement is 81% foreign owned, movie industry now 70% foreign owned.

### GDP Far Overstates Our True Economic Health

We say our GDP is growing over 4% per year over the last 10 years. However, this statistic does not adequately measure the impact of the deterioration of our domestically owned production and manufacturing capabilities. 70% of GDP is consumer spending—dollars that now go largely to imports or products made domestically by foreign-owned companies (e.g., Hyundai's produced in Alabama). Figures from the IRS show that imports account for at least 25% of manufactured goods consumption in the U.S. and that many U.S. so-called domestic industries are actually 25% to 80% owned by foreign interests.

### Rising GDP Only Increases US Trade Deficits

Therefore, as our domestically owned manufacturing continues to decline, rising GDP actually increases the balance-of-trade deficits. In other words, *the more our economy "grows," the deeper in debt we become*. On average, our balance-of-trade deficit has grown 24% compounded annually over the last 10 years. GDP simply does not account for the loss of wealth producing assets or the future cost of repaying the debts and rebuilding our lost industries.

In 2004 alone, the balance-of-trade deficit was a record \$617 Billion. That is approximately \$1.2 Million per minute leaving our country, coming back not to buy merchandise but to buy us out.

### Repaying Our Debts With What?

How will we ever repay our debts (\$400+ Billion per year internal Government budget deficit plus \$600+ Billion per year external trade deficit) when we no longer have any significant tradeable, domestically owned wealth-producing industries left? How can we fund new growth and repay debts to foreign countries if our industries and their profits are owned by those very countries?

### Our Priorities Are Distorted

While we focus on changing Social Security and other programs, we don't realize that no system will work if we are not able to create wealth within our own country to fund it. The most important priority is planning for our economic health, from which many other issues will be resolved. If this country is not fundamentally capable of sustaining itself without huge imports and massive borrowings, no amount of legislation will satisfy our obligations and sustain our standard of living.

### How Well and How Long Can We Live Like This?

How secure can we be if we must live on imports and sell off or dismantle our factories? And how safe will we be if we are forced to *outsource* our manufacturing to foreign companies in order to compete? How can we justify subsidized foreign owned manufacturing *insourcing* in America (e.g., the auto industry) that is operating for their profit and their benefit while they destroy our unsubsidized and disadvantaged American-owned auto and other factories that are saddled with excessive health and pension costs? Chrysler is now a German company. General Motors is in quick decline and has lost \$1.1 Billion in the last quarter alone. Ford is quickly losing market share. If some outside enemy wanted to destroy America, they couldn't do it better than we are doing it to ourselves.

*We are taking the invulnerability and permanence of our industries and our country for granted while other countries are actively engaged in our undoing. Why are we allowing this to happen? Who is responsible for this?*

You have lived in a great country. At this rate, your children will not have it as good or as safe as you have had.

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## BOOKS

[*Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream*, Barbara Ehrenreich, Metropolitan Books, 256 pages]

# All About Barbara

By Marian Kester Coombs

TIME WAS WHEN conservatives would dismiss out of hand another exposé by a leftist would-be rabble-rouser like Barbara Ehrenreich. But these being times of violent political realignment when Left and Right appear to merge, converge, and otherwise shape-shift all over the landscape, one approaches with an open mind any likely attempt to make sense of what ails us.

Ehrenreich earned a doctorate in biology but never entered the field professionally; her times—the early '70s—seemed to demand activism for social change, and she decided to use her background to tackle issues of inequality, oppression, and exploitation in such periodicals as *Ms.*, *Harper's*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. She became well known as a caustic, dependably radical voice, willing to attack the Left from the left if need be.

But nothing prepared her for the 2001 success of *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. An interview from that year offers insight into her ongoing reservations about having chosen the scribbling/chattering life over that of the hands-on healer. Robert Birnbaum asked what she, in particular, brought to her book's subject—the parlous paycheck-to-paycheck existence of America's working poor—and she replied, "I like to think what was special about me ... was that I actually did the work. I don't mean the writing work, I mean I did the *jobs*. I take great pride in that."

The question that torments every successful writer ("How do I top this?") inevitably arose, and Ehrenreich cast about for some time before hitting upon the plight of laid-off white-collar professionals: evidence began pointing to "something seriously wrong within a socioeconomic group I had indeed neglected as too comfortable and too powerful to merit my concern." As fodder for another bestseller, in other words, this group might now "merit her concern." The crucial difference this time, however, is that while for the earlier book she had done a crackerjack job simulating a waitress and a Wal-Mart "associate," among other low-wage occupations, to investigate the world of unemployed upper management, she now had to pass as one of them.

For a person so eager to search out and destroy any hint of duplicity in a politician or businessman, Ehrenreich is astonishingly nonchalant about the fact that for *Bait and Switch* she reverted to her maiden name and made up a new identity, résumé, "skill set," educational background, references, and so forth. Even more astonishing, she pays some lip service to the possibility that her failure to get hired by corporate America might have to do with not being who she claimed to be, but clearly she doesn't view it as a major obstacle.

"Deception is part of the game," she marvels at one point.

Barbara's second step is to line up job coaching in the "transition industry" for the white-collar unemployed. We are immediately introduced to her view of other people: unless they are in the most abjectly pitiable of states, her contempt seethes to the surface. Their clothes are questionable, their personal habits are a bit creepy, and they are just not very bright.

She does make some interesting observations. For instance, she nails the strange, pseudo-Zen, EST-derived fixation on "inner change" that underlies modern job coaching—although she is by no means the first person to do so—calling most of its lore "a pastiche of wispy New Age yearnings." Her critique of the "science" of personality types is sound (they've proven to have "zero predictive value") even as she dimly recognizes that she must somehow find a fit between herself and "any institutional structure that will have me."

Barbara's task, then, is to persuade some sucker in HR at some corporation that she wants to take the bait. What exactly is the "bait" referred to in the book's title, what does it get "switched" to, and by whom? What she means by "bait" is never quite clear, but it seems to be the American Dream

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"Barbara Alexander's" first step is to choose which field she will try to be hired into—"I had the disadvantage of never having held a white-collar job with a corporation." She decides upon public relations, which she calls "journalism's evil twin." This is an apt characterization, as Barbara immediately discovers that "the essence of resume writing" is to "perpetrate fakery"; she even realizes that her own journalistic background—doing PR for the Left, i.e., "writing to persuade"—makes her an almost credible candidate for such jobs.

itself, still conceived of as secure life-long employment at a paternalistic company, although such jobs have been scarce for a very long while.

Networking is step #3. Here Barbara learns that looking for a job is a full-time job, that "being unemployed may in and of itself disqualify one for a job" by creating a dreaded Catch-22 "gap" in one's résumé, and that, incredibly, "all the companies want to know is what I can do for them." Again, she often describes social reality well enough. For instance, her description of the dull-eyed anomie