

not accompanied us to Leon. Without their careful guidance, the testimony on economic pluralism begins to unravel. While the businessman makes his case, his young U.S.-educated son stands by. Clad in tight designer jeans, aviator glasses clipped onto his Lacoste T-shirt, the son smirks at the irony of his father's tolerance for the government's strict controls. Finally, the older man admits, "The educated people, the bourgeoisie, are constantly threatened as a class." Then the son pipes up. "The army is the new class. They are not well-educated, but they are powerful."

In Leon, these remarks are the closest we come to the gritty facts of real people's lives. Then it's back to a presentation on post-revolutionary day-care, followed by refreshments at a former "bourgeois social club" rehabilitated into a "revolutionary disco-

discotheque," and lunch at a restaurant cooperative run by reformed prostitutes.

A late afternoon meeting with pro-government Christian community leaders does little to lift our spirits. "We volunteer to pick cotton, to join the militias, to work in the Sandinista Defense Committees," says one of the middle-class Christian leaders, "because we believe we must offer an example, and because we see the revolution is addressing the problems of the poor."

But these Christians' strict adherence to Sandinista doctrine raises suspicions about their commitment to social justice. Our doubts are confirmed when we search for the bathroom and chance upon the servants' squalid living quarters.

Sunday: Today we attend a Catholic

church service which Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer describes as a "*campesino* mass without any *campesinos*." Murals depicting the FSLN flag and the party's founder, Carlos Fonseca, decorate the church wall. The priest who celebrates the mass is the unofficial leader of the pro-government "popular church." "We must ask," he tells his primarily foreign audience of Americans and Europeans, "how do we become new people through the revolution and new people through Christ?" During the homily's "dialogue" session, U.S. cotton and coffee *brigadistas* troop to the microphone and express their enthusiasm for the revolutionary process. We sit in our pews and wait for the signal that we'll depart for our dinner at a local restaurant.

Our contingent doesn't belong

among these fervent believers; we won't advance this tropical revolution as a prophetic model for its Latin neighbors. But we soon discover that our peculiar reaction will have no impact on our tour's Minnesota headquarters. There the machinery for channeling newly inspired activism remains solidly in place, and will not soon be dislodged by a few hardened skeptics.

Just over a month after our return, the "travel seminar alumni" mailings begin. Most urge lobbying at congressional district offices and participation in protests against the renewal of covert aid. One letter remarks: "We have had special insight into the struggle and hope in Central America. A message many of us return with is to 'tell the people and the government of the United States what you saw.' This is the time to do it." □

THE TALKIES



TWENTY YEARS TOO LATE

by John Podhoretz

It has long been a matter of discussion why Hollywood hasn't made more movies about Vietnam. The answer is simple: We lost, and a war movie about defeat is not something anybody wants to see. The war movie is one of Hollywood's traditional pay-dirt box-office winners, and each war has its own kind of movie with its own kind of plot, made and remade and remade still again. The generic World War II movie, for example, is about a small band of men, from almost every conceivable ethnic group, battling what always appeared to be a better-armed, smarter, and terrifying enemy, and winning anyway.

So when Hollywood wanted to make a generic Vietnam war movie, it had to figure out just how to do it without getting bogged down in a defeat. And, with its typical ingenuity, Hollywood came up with a solution: It just requires our going back to Indochina in the 1980s and fighting the war over again, on a small scale to be sure, and getting it right for once.

This brilliant gambit is most powerfully demonstrated by an excrescence

called *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, a hilariously lamebrained and preposterous Sylvester Stallone vehicle that improves on most other Stallone vehicles by keeping Sylvester's mouth almost entirely shut and his pectorals almost constantly flexing.

As I write, *Rambo* is raking in about \$25 million a week across the country, and should it continue at this pace it will end up as one of the most successful movies ever made. It is the fourth movie in three years to feature a story about a Vietnam veteran going back to Indochina to bring back some of those still listed as "missing in action."

The first, *Uncommon Valor*, was released at Christmastime 1983 with almost no publicity and starring only Gene Hackman, who is far from a box-office draw these days. Much to the wonderment of everyone in Hollywood, *Uncommon Valor* was the third-largest hit of the season, making \$70 million at the box office. In the spring of 1984, Chuck Norris's *Missing in Action* also proved to be a surprise monster hit, occasioning an extraordinarily rapid sequel, *MIA II*, in December 1984.

Their plots are almost identical,

based largely on the exploits of former Green Beret Col. Bo Gritz, who led a widely publicized hunt through Laos for MIAs and POWs in 1981. The events of each movie are telegraphed at the beginning, and thus are rather predictable: Men tramp through the jungle, find a small crew of MIAs in prisoner-of-war camps, fight their way out, and get them home. The moving and beautifully acted *Uncommon Valor* is far and away the best of the four, so it is not as if people were going to see these movies for the novelty. What they like is the familiarity. Far from being terrified of "another Vietnam," audiences seem to relish the sight of Americans back in Indochina correcting their past mistake. And that mistake was not involvement, it was defeat.

"Sir, do we get to win this time?" These are Rambo's words at the beginning of the movie, and they are the film's most important. We find Rambo on a chain gang, where he has been sent because of the transgressions he committed in *First Blood*, the 1982 movie to which *Rambo* is the sequel. *First Blood* had the Special Forces

veteran wandering aimlessly through America and getting mistreated and roughed up by the populace of a small northwestern town. Finally, Rambo decides that he has had enough, and brings to bear on the town all of the skills he perfected in the jungles of Vietnam. By film's end, the town is a wreck, Rambo has made a passionate speech to his former C.O. about how badly Americans have treated the Vietnam veterans, and is, Christlike, sent to jail for their sins.

In *Rambo*, his C.O. has come to spring him from jail to go back to Vietnam and do reconnaissance. He is only to go in from their base of operations in Thailand, take photographs, and get out. Public opinion (possibly generated by *Uncommon Valor* and *Missing in Action*, though this is left unstated) has demanded a complete accounting of our soldiers.

But though public opinion demands answers, Washington wants the issue to die completely. The evil bureaucrat in charge of the operation explains it to Rambo's C.O.: "Do you really want us to open that wound again?" So when Rambo (who has lost his camera in a mild *contretemps* with some pirates) takes one of the MIAs out of the camp

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he has visited as evidence and proceeds with him to the point where he is to be picked up by helicopter, the bureaucrat tells the helicopter pilots not to land.

It is a powerful scene: Rambo shouting at the helicopter "Don't leave us here," the soldiers from the camp advancing upon them, the rickety, gangrenous MIA watching helplessly as his nation abandons him again in a cruel land.

Rambo is taken back to the camp and, significantly, is interrogated not by a Vietnamese, but by a Russian general. The Russian, played by Steven Berkoff in the most hilariously overdone villain performance since Richard Lee's nasty "Jap" in every World War II film, tortures the magnificent Stallone body and threatens to stick a red-hot piece of iron in the MIA's eye unless Rambo gets on the radio and announces to the world that he is an American spy.

Rambo agrees, and wires Thailand. He asks to speak to the nasty bureaucrat. "I'm coming for you," he says, the camera in a tight closeup of

his mouth. He then beats up the Russian and everybody else, gets all the MIAs, commandeers a helicopter, destroys a Russian helicopter gunboat, and proceeds back to base.

Upon arrival, Rambo destroys the fancy monitoring equipment at the base, beats up the bureaucrat, and lunges at him with a knife, implanting it finally not in the bureaucrat's chest, but right next to his head.

His C.O. joins him on the tarmac. "Where are you going, Johnny?" the C.O. asks. "I don't know," Rambo replies. The C.O. suggests he return to America and what will almost certainly be a full presidential pardon. Rambo only shakes his head.

"Don't you love your country?" the C.O. asks.

"I'd die for my country," Rambo replies. Then, almost turning toward the camera and directing his words to the audience, he speaks for every Vietnam veteran. "We only want our country to love us as much as we love it." And with that, he walks into the Thai

sunset, whence he will presumably be returned for *First Blood Part III*.

When Stallone made *First Blood*, Rambo's impassioned speech about the troubles of being a Vet was quite dramatic and stark; it was, in fact, the first time such a speech was made on screen. Now, three years later, it sounds almost like self-pity. Everybody loves the Vietnam veterans these days, and though no apologies have really been given to them for the years in which they were treated shabbily, even those who once denounced them can be heard sighing over Agent Orange or post-traumatic syndrome.

That has been the signal contribution of these four movies. Bad as all but *Uncommon Valor* are, they tell us something about the American people and the Vietnam war.

And that is that the serious debate over the Vietnam war is now over. The debate began in earnest only after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Before then, those responsible for prosecuting the

war never gave anyone a good reason for supporting it, while most of those responsible for coming up with policy, and writing about policy, had spent eleven years offering millions of reasons, some good, a lot bad, for opposing it. Only when the catastrophic and monstrous behavior of the Communist regimes in Vietnam and Cambodia quieted some of the more vociferous voices on the left, and gave some leeway to nervous voices on the right, did the discussion really begin.

The ruling is now in, as the hundreds of millions of dollars spent at the box office and the videocassette store on these movies now attest. If we were going to go in at all, we should have fought to win. And the tragedy is that had they made movies like this during the Johnson Administration (John Wayne's silly *Green Berets* doesn't count), perhaps those responsible for selling the war to the American people would have had enough confidence to make the case that was eventually made by the deaths of three million Indochinese. □

THE GREAT IRISH SALOON SERIES



BRADY'S OF MAYNOOTH

by William McGurn

In an age whose dismal hallmark is an almost universal decline in standards, decent American men and women do not need to be reminded what this has meant to the Republic's saloons. Those valiant holdouts from the ferns-and-lite-beer ethos grow fewer with every passing day, and decades from now scholars doubtless will link the phenomenon with the general enervating of America.

Theology, however, counsels that the only unforgivable sin is despair, and as usual even in these sorry times we are not without some measure of hope. For at the westernmost extremity of Europe, the same green isle that kept learning alive during the continent's Dark Ages has kept the lamp lit in our own. True, Ireland recently legalized contraception and is working on

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divorce, people whose older siblings were weaned on fish-and-chips now congregate at McDonald's or Burger King, and the island's hierarchy has chimed in the general chorus of ecclesiastical babblings about Central America. Against this mounting clamor of foolishness, the Irish countryside has thrown up its one faithful soul, the noble publican.

The Church falters, the Commonwealth crumbles, but by and large this man has barred the worst elements of our wretched century from his domain. Under his patient eye the daily needs of the Irishman are sorted out in a manner well befitting the appellation public house: Here local news is reported and digested; loans extended and repaid; brawls instigated and put down; business deals struck; elections fixed; urgent messages deposited; matches arranged; the human appetite for companionship and song satiated. A refuge from the demands of a nagging wife and the ever-expanding State

(much the same thing these days), the Irish public house remains a standard of normalcy in a most unnatural world.

Though my own brief existence here on earth has been marked by innumerable errors in judgment, I was at least fortunate that my initiation to the world of saloonery was consummated in a place of suitable taste and refinement. This establishment goes by the honest name of "Brady's" and is located in the County Kildare village of Maynooth, a miserable hour's bus-ride on the Number 66 from Dublin. At the time of my introduction, I and several other American expats were registered at the local university, primarily known for its seminary, the country's largest. So whatever wisdom was imparted to us during that formative year we owe less to the classroom than to our more informal academic pursuits at Brady's. To our surprise we learned that there in fact

existed a Brady behind the name—Phillip Brady—who with his wife and family have been servicing the town of Maynooth for more than half a century.

The untrained eye, it must be said, would grant Brady's nary a second glance. Ordinary by even ordinary standards, in its structure and ethos it is any bar anywhere in Ireland. Upstairs can be found the modest Brady residence; downstairs there are both the traditional Irish lounge (where women are tolerated) and bar (where they are not). There is in addition a small, somewhat hidden room where the select few might gather to enjoy their beverages after hours without upsetting the local constabulary.

As there were women in our group, most of our business was conducted in the lounge, our coats piled up high in front of the large window. Cramped together on tan vinyl couches of dubious design and no comfort, we would take our drink and talk, a turf