

FILM

A major studio film on the war that still isn't

THE BOYS IN COMPANY C

Directed by Sidney Furie
With Stan Shaw, Andrew Stevens,
James Cannings, Michael
Lembeck, Craig Wasson, Scott
Hylands, James Whitmore Jr.
and Noble Willingham
Columbia Pictures, Rated R

To a large extent, Vietnam was always the war that wasn't. Here, our reason for being there was never really explained by "the best and the brightest." There, Americans tried to fight "Charlie," about whose culture they knew nothing and whose face they almost never actually saw. Today, the war still *isn't*, having been largely repressed in the national consciousness.

The Boys in Company C, the first major studio film on the war, follows a motley cross-section of Marine draftees from the dehumanizing basic training at Camp Pendleton, where they're called "shit," "maggots," and "vomit," through a whole series of comic, futile and lethal encounters (culminating with the January 1968 Tet Offensive) in Vietnam.

Except for Tyrone (Stan Shaw), a street-wise, hardened and gutsy black, the five protagonists are all white innocents abroad. They include Billy Ray (Andre Stevens), a "white cracker jock," Vinnie (Michael Lembeck), an over-sexed, happy-go-lucky kid from Brooklyn, and Dave (Craig Wasson), who looks like Jesus Christ and is a conscientious objector. The film's episodes are narrated by Alvin (James Canning), a budding writer who is keeping a journal of life in Company C. Among the company's officers are the avuncular Lt. Archer (James Whitmore Jr.), the red-neck Sgt. Curry (Noble Willingham) and the inevitable Capt. Collins who, when not hysterically barking orders, is obsessed with having his men achieve record "body counts."

If the characters are somewhat stereotypical, director Furie (*The Ipcress File*, *Little Fauss and Big Halsey*, *Gable and Lombard*) still

manages to pull off an entertaining yet unsettling film thanks to a brisk pace that juxtaposes drama and black comedy *a la M.A.S.H.*

You don't come away from *Company C* with your political consciousness raised very much. It only touches on the extent of the destruction America wreaked on the people and the land, and on the corruption of Thieu and his followers. But certain scenes and episodes "stick." For example, suspecting that a village harbors Vietcong, Captain Collins orders it shelled into oblivion. When the men enter the smoking remains, they find mainly old people, cowering and dazed. Collins still demands the "body count" which, after a pregnant pause, is reported as "two chickens and a duck."

In the film's final episode, the Company C soccer team (the "Muthuhs") is promised exemption from field duty if it will throw a match to the South Viet Security Police Dragons in order to build inter-allied morale. In what is an obvious metaphor for the war's prolongation, the boys can't bring themselves to do it, preferring "winning" to "living." It hardly matters, as the soccer stadium is hit by a barrage of mortar fire—part of the Tet Offensive.

Before the credits come on, we're informed that of the 110 men in the actual company C, 41 were killed, 51 injured, and two are still missing-in-action. With all its sardonic vignettes, *The Boys in Company C* leaves a bitter aftertaste. It makes you wonder how America—especially the men who fought in Vietnam—put up with the whole fraudulent, cursed thing for so long. Capturing the grotesque farce of Vietnam—the chasm between Marine macho rhetoric at Pendleton and the fear, racism and futile dying in Vietnam—*Company C* makes you realize why we've rushed to forget about the war.

—David M. Szonyi
David M. Szonyi reviews films and books regularly for IN THESE TIMES.



Three members of Company C: Andre Stevens as "a white cracker jock"; Stan Shaw as "A street-wise, hardened and gutsy black"; and Michael Lembeck as "an over-sexed, happy-go-lucky kid from Brooklyn."

A people's-eye-view of the revolution

VIVA PORTUGAL

English version produced by
Marc N. Weiss for Infoscope
80 minutes, color, 16mm

Gil Scott-Heron says that the revolution won't be televised. But seeing *Viva Portugal* makes you wonder.

Three German TV film-makers went to Portugal shortly after the coup that overthrew the Caetano regime in April 1974 and spent the next year recording the unfolding events there. The result is a moving documentary of the efforts of the Portuguese people to regain control of their society after 50 years of fascism.

Dramatic scenes abound. Relatives greet political prisoners

freed from Caxias prison, notorious for its underground dungeons that fill with water at high tide. Transport union members refuse to carry right-wing demonstrators to Lisbon for a possible counter-coup, and leftist soldiers search incoming cars for weapons. Former leaders of the PIDE (the fascist secret police) are taken to jail in their own van.

Viva Portugal does not focus on leaders vying for power. The film's strength is its ability to capture the spirit of everyday people engaged in becoming actors in history for the first time. Peasants who have seized an absentee landlord's estate are seen meeting in a windmill to discuss setting up a cooperative to farm



their land. Bank workers explain how they have labored at copying records proving that the bank has illegally channeled funds to right-wing organizations.

In an extraordinary sequence, the camera follows a paratrooper assault aimed at neutralizing the barracks of RAL 1, sometimes known as the Red Regiment. Two paratroopers crouch against barrack walls as a RAL 1 soldier explains that they don't understand what's happening.

Mike in hand, a TV reporter stands by as the contending forces negotiate over whether they are to shoot at each other. The rank and file come to realize they've been misled by their superiors and end up running to embrace their comrades in the barracks.

The film does not analyze how

Soares was able to gain control of the government or why many of the moves toward more popular control have been reversed. But it shows political change as the sum of a multitude of small, practical decisions, and a human activity, one subject to twists and turns.

For example, villagers are shown debating whether it was right to occupy a rich family's mansion to house a medical clinic. "Won't the owner be angry?" wonders someone. "But he's never here," comes the reply. "Shouldn't he have at least been talked to," demands another. A woman who apologizes for being illiterate sums up the popular view of the situation: "I can't say anything about big political decisions...But one thing I know—the house has got to be ours!"

Viva Portugal has been shown widely in Europe, both on TV and to live audiences. New York film-maker Marc Weiss saw the original German version at the 1975 Mannheim Festival, where it won first prize of the International Film Critics Association. He has produced an edited version in English, using the voices of a theater group from Antioch College. The decision to use voice-overs rather than subtitles was a wise one, for it preserves the sense of real-life drama essential to this people's-eye view of politics.

—Doug Honig
The film can be obtained through the *Viva Portugal* Project, 140 Waverly Place—6C, New York, New York 10014.

Doug Honig writes for the *Northwest Passage* in Seattle.

Born again media

What with Anita Bryant, Chuck Colson, Eldridge Cleaver and Larry Flynt all making appearances, the National Religious Broadcasters were awash with controversy.

RIGHT FROM THE START, THE folks who put together the 35th Annual National Religious Broadcasters Convention wanted everyone to know where they stood. So they opened both their first evening session and their keynote plenary here with concerts by Anita Bryant.

Sure enough, people got the message. Several thousand of them, in fact, understood it well enough to want to hand-deliver their reply. They did, ringing the Washington Hilton while Bryant sang *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. One of them managed to get inside the Hilton's International Ballroom and made a long story short, shouting "Anita you're a fascist!" until he was dragged out (Bryant's reply: "I love you too.")

If anything, though, the noisy but orderly demonstration outside their citadel strengthened the strong sense of righteousness that pervaded Bryant's audience and the convention itself.

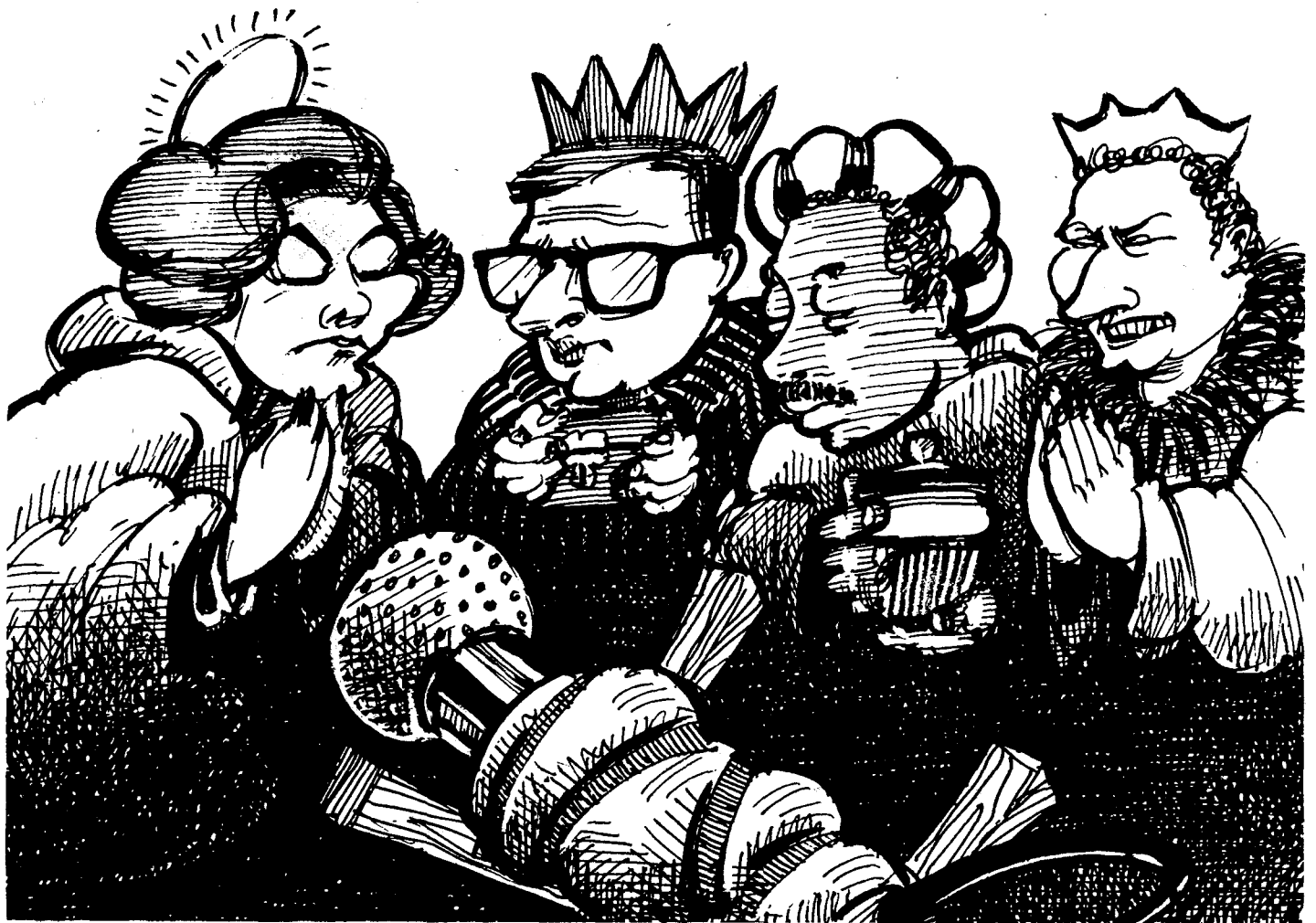
"It's so wonderful, what you're doing," NRB spokesman Bill Bray told Bryant as he introduced her to a press conference in which the questions focused, predictably, on gay rights and Bryant obliged with a reprise of her Miami campaign rhetoric: homosexuals are not "a legitimate minority group." The broadcasters ate it up.

Anita Bryant's set piece confrontation with the marching forces of Satan, however, proved to be one of the easier battles for the conference organizers to fight, since practically all the delegates in attendance agreed that homosexuality, along with other plagues such as Communism, the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, and doubts about the complete infallibility of the Bible, were well outside the limits of their understanding of religion.

Theological and political right.

The NRB's constituency—a rapidly growing one—is made up of the rightward ends of both the theological and political spectrums, and like other such constituencies it is more vulnerable to inner division than outward assault. Thus the NRB heavies found it tougher to decide what to do with two of their own most notorious recent recruits, Larry Flynt and Eldridge Cleaver.

Larry Flynt, as everyone must know by now, had a vision of Jesus last November under the tender influence of President Carter's evangelist sister and is now reportedly busily planning the transformation of *Hustler* magazine from the most famous lay gynecological publication go-



ing into a wholesome Christian sex education journal.

A what? Well, wait til the April issue comes out and find out for yourself what that means.

And if it sounds confusing to you and me, Flynt's reported schemes for spreading the gospel were downright incredible to some NRB executives. They had built their whole convention program around organizing an assault on sex and violence in the mass media. To them, apparently, Larry Flynt was still a convicted pornographer, a purveyor of scratch and sniff centerfolds. His conversion, some suspected, might have been nothing more than the latest in a long string of shrewd publicity stunts.

Flynt's coming, though, had been announced to the world in a preconvention press release. His role was unspecified, but Flynt later said he had been promised a slot on the big Sex and Violence in the Media panel, the former at least being a topic on which he could speak with some experience.

But it was not to be. The panel was held without him.

One NRBer quotes Flynt as having told a Washington church audience the previous Sunday that he preferred whorehouses to churches on Sunday mornings because "the whorehouses are more integrated."

That tore it. Flynt managed to talk to the press in a Hilton hallway, and commented that "I get the impression from the church people and evangelicals that they think I want a piece of their pie. I don't want to make religion my business." Then he drove to the airport, climbed into his pink jet, and split.

Eldridge and his pants.

No sooner was Flynt gone, though, than the NRBers were faced with another flap, this time over Eldridge Cleaver's pants. This one was particularly embarrassing because, second only to Charles Colson, with whom he frequently appears at big-time revivals, Cleaver has been regarded as among the biggest fish captured by the

evangelicals' missionary nets in the last several years.

Colson had put in a cameo appearance the first night of the convention, introducing a movie about his post-conversion work with prisoners. Cleaver was much more heavily scheduled—he was to introduce the world premiere of a movie called *The Eldridge Cleaver Story*, join a breakfast panel discussing "Evangelicals in Search of an Identity," and then conduct a press conference, which promised to draw a crowd of intrigued and skeptical reporters.

The hitch came over rumors that Cleaver was going to make use of one of these forums to promote a line of men's pants that he had designed. The pants reportedly are distinguished for their use of a codpiece, a flap over the genitals.

This feature, or even the suggestion of it, many in authority at the NRB found sexy, shocking and insufferable. And they wasted no time: reporters and others who showed up Tuesday evening for Cleaver's movie, anxious to follow the chronicle of his pilgrimage from prison to Panthers to preacher, were confronted instead with a widescreen color videotape of a Billy Graham Christmas special, highlighted by Johnny Cash's telling of a mawkish fable about a bunch of drunks in the Old West being redeemed by the presence of a baby in their midst.

Inquiries about the Cleaver film to NRB president Abe van der Puy provoked a tight-lipped response: "We've made a change and that's all I've got to say."

The following morning's breakfast

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BY CHUCK FAGER

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