

presence on screen than he ever did while playing all those disillusioned naifs, striding through the wicked world of grown-ups. It's as though, after years of vanilla-flavored performances, he's suddenly come of age before the cameras. With his sinewy forcefulness, Voight is able to offset the sanctity that clings to this character from time to time, and the simplicity and directness of his approach give conviction to everything he does in the film.

The goodwill generated by Voight and Fonda, and the understated realism of the hospital scenes, go a long way toward compensating for some fairly major lapses. Not the least of these is the nonstop medley of Blasts from the Past which pulsate at random over the soundtrack in a manner that is rather more obtrusive than evocative. A catatonic teen-aged veteran (adequately played by Robert Carradine, youngest of the clan) is introduced and then peremptorily dispatched, for no discernible reason other than to wrench a little extra pathos out of the material.

Most problematic of all is the one-dimensional cipher that stands in where Bruce Dern's character ought to be. Heaven knows that bug-eyed, trembly-chinned Dern has had practice enough playing roles like this before, and he tips his manic hand far too early along. Yet since the part as written is little more than a walking plot device, and unsympathetically limned at that, he can hardly be blamed. Ashby makes a rather feeble analogy between the Marine captain's politics and his sexual shortcomings—a cheap shot that reveals nothing except an unwillingness to take this character very seriously. (Pity the poor movie reactionary—in Italian movies he's forced to sodomize dewy-eyed innocents, while in America he can barely grasp the intricacies of the missionary position.)

As the movie winds down, Luke and Sally aren't the only ones who are troubled by Hyde's impending return—the people behind the camera haven't the remotest notion of what to do with him either. Clearly he can't be permitted to interfere with the love story—that would run contrary to all the expectations the movie carefully nurtures from their first meeting. So in obvious desperation, they force the captain to march headlong into the sea, à la Norman Maine in *A Star Is Born*. In sixties parlance, it's a cop-out, pure and simple. Yet even this can't eradicate the warmth and intelligence of all that preceded it.

**T**HE BOYS IN COMPANY C is, if anything, even more ambitious, detailing the physical and psychological decimation of a Marine company from basic training through final body count. This movie, however, is an object lesson in fumbled good intentions—it's just *The Green Berets* in ideological reverse, scarcely less simple-minded and just as luridly propagandistic. For all I know every outrage depicted in this film may be grounded in absolute, documented truth, but Sidney Furie's apparently boundless instinct for the banal makes it all seem about as fresh and genuine as, say, *Gable and Lombard*, another of his misbegotten projects. The push-button raunch and sentimentality of the script (co-written by Furie) borrows indiscriminately from recent films (a climactic sports match out of *M\*A\*S\*H*, prophetically gloomy end-titles à la *American Graffiti*), and old olive-drab epics dating back at least as far as *Guadalcanal Diary*, then tosses in a few updated variations—lots of cussing and battleworn cynicism, a no-nonsense young black as hero in place of the outmoded WASP icon—without managing for a moment to camouflage how stale it all is. In true Jack L. Warner fashion, the platoon is a model of stereotypic symmetry—the aforementioned street-smart ghetto graduate, the well-scrubbed all-American jock, the benign hippie, the sensitive literary type who keeps a journal, and of course the randy, loud-mouthed Italian stallion (let's hear it for Brooklyn!). With the exception of the black platoon leader, whose muddled motivations shift practically from one shot to the next, you could sketch their nuances of character on the backs of their dogtags, and have room to spare. The treatment of the native populace is, if anything, even more obvious—the displaced peasants are invariably sweet and simple and silent, while the South Vietnamese brass outdo Philip Ahn in sheer Oriental cunning and malice.

The young and largely unknown cast struggles mightily to make something worthwhile out of all this, but they're as doomed as the besieged GIs they were drafted to represent. Furie knows enough to keep things moving at a swift pace, but energy has never been a substitute for basic competence—the bilious color and resolutely flat and uninvolved *mise en scène* match his flair for characterization. It may well be true that he had the sincerest motives in the

world for making this movie, but the end result smells like the worst kind of exploitation. □

## OUT AND AROUND

**Close Encounters of the Third Kind**—If you're one of the few hardy souls who've been put off by the hype and the endless lines at the box office, now's the time to go ahead and see it. As anyone who succumbed to *Jaws* already knows, nobody else in the business manipulates sound, images, and the audience with the well-calibrated skill of Steven Spielberg. This movie is prestidigitation of the most dazzling order, but anyone who tells you it's a "profound religious experience" is confusing Om with Oz.

**The One and Only**—Carl Reiner perpetrated this saga of a brazen showoff who finds fame as an exhibition wrestler in the early years of video, and it's an alarming mixture of equal parts goo and grungy bad taste. The endless antics of the hero are supposed to be disarmingly outrageous, but someone should tell Reiner, screenwriter Steve Gordon, and star Henry Winkler that charm and self-love are two entirely different things.

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# LETTERS

**Letters to the editor should be addressed to INQUIRY Magazine, 1700 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, California 94111. The editors reserve the right to edit letters for length when necessary.**

## Funds for Paraguay

**A**FTER READING RICHARD Arens's impressive and informative article, "Death Camps in Paraguay" [INQUIRY, Jan. 2, 1978], I sat down to write a letter to my congressman and discovered that I needed additional information in order to write an effective letter. What is the American involvement in Paraguay? How much aid does that government receive from the United States?

JAMES R. ALMBLAD  
Portland, Oreg.

Since 1954, when General Alfredo Stroessner took control, the U.S. government has supplied Paraguay with a total of \$160 million in economic and military aid. The State Department estimates aid figures for the current fiscal year at \$12.7 million economic and \$1.1 million military. As of the coming year, U.S. military aid has been phased out, and Brazil has taken over training the Paraguayan military forces.

In addition to direct aid, the United States funds Paraguay through a number of intermediary agencies. In 1977, the Export-Import Bank of the United States provided Paraguay with \$7.4 million in loans and guarantees; the Inter-American Development Bank provided \$13.8 million; and the World Bank approved \$40 million in loans to Stroessner's regime.  
—EDITORS

## Inconsistent watchdog

**J**ONATHAN MARSHALL'S ARTICLE on "Britain's Attack on Civil Liberties" [INQUIRY, Jan. 23, 1978] is disfigured by too many mistakes and misunderstandings to pass without comment.

The most important misunderstanding is the assumption that the current official and unofficial attack on civil liberties is something new, when it is part of the battle between the estab-

lishment and various dissenting forces which has been running for several centuries. The British "tradition" of "tolerance and liberal spirit" is only a pragmatic recognition of the balance of forces at any given time, and the cases of the past decade are much the same as cases during any previous decade. The most important mistake is the assumption that the National Council for Civil Liberties is "Britain's most vigilant civil liberties watchdog," when it was a Marxist (Stalinist) front during the 1930s and 1940s, and after a libertarian phase has again become a Marxist (Trotskyist) front during the 1970s. Its true position may be seen from its reluctance to campaign for the victims of intolerance by trade unions rather than of "intrusion by the government and industry," for the right not to strike rather than the right to strike, for free speech for right-wing rather than left-wing dissenters, for white rather than black racists. More consistent watchdogs are the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, and the Writers and Scholars International (publishers of *Index on Censorship*); and warning barks may also be heard from the anarchist and humanist organizations.

When Marshall criticizes "the government's system of immigration control," which is indeed open to serious objection, he leaves out the important point that Britain still has one of the most liberal immigration policies in the world. When he claims that "the biggest setbacks of the last year have involved press freedom" and concentrates on recent cases of persecution under the laws covering security and blasphemy, he leaves out the important point that some of the biggest advances of recent years have been in these areas, where the press has gone further than ever before in deliberate defiance of such laws. In particular, both the Agee-Hosenball and Aubrey-Berry-Campbell cases involve articles and the *Gay News* case involves a poem which could never have appeared openly before the 1970s.

As Marshall himself says, investigative journalism is "a relatively uncommon disease in Britain," and previous

attempts to spread it to government security have involved either imprisonment or clandestinity (as when the "Spies for Peace" in 1963 circulated details of the emergency government system in a pseudonymous pamphlet), but this kind of material is now commonplace in the left-wing press. Similarly, material breaking religious taboos is now commonplace, even in religious papers, and it was Jens Jørgen Thorsen's much-publicized attempt to enter Britain to make a film about the sex life of Jesus which seems to have prompted the *Gay News* case.

The "best hope" of preserving our freedoms in Britain is not "public campaigns by vigilant groups like the National Council for Civil Liberties," as Marshall thinks, but direct action to exercise the freedoms our ancestors extracted in the same way from governments of both left and right.

NICOLAS WALTER  
London, England

## Guns and pot

**B**ELATED KUDOS TO DON B. Kates, Jr. [INQUIRY, Dec. 5, 1977] for his vivisection of the doctrinaire "liberal" pose on guns—one which is every iota as police-statist as the right wing's rigidity on human behavior.

Of course, what Kates really did was clearly state a left-libertarian view on firearms ownership.

In my 10 years of staff employment with the National Rifle Association, and especially the last five years as Western public affairs representative, one of my great burdens was internal—convincing the Sun City/Old Guard hierarchs in NRA that you cannot with integrity urge autos-da-fé for pot smokers while simultaneously insisting on unfettered gun ownership. So I can attest, in tune with Kates's theme, that the pro-gun fossilhood is just as off balance on human liberty as the spastic liberals Kates assails.

BILL DAVIDSON  
Mandeville, La.

BILL DAVIDSON is the author of *To Keep & Bear Arms*.