

NAPALM in the MORNING

Yes indeed -- it's been a long time coming, but for those of you who thought the first (described by Brian Earl Brown in WoFan 16 as "mostly about how impressed (I) was with Apocalypse Now", presumably because he hadn't actually read the first three pages) was just a one-shot here's the genuine second issue of this lightly armoured, highly mobile airborne assault fanzine from Joseph Nicholas, Room 9, 94 St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY, United Kingdom -- and containing, as promised last time, Something Completely Different -- just to confound you. (And if you managed to keep hold of the thread of the sentence through that lot then you're probably Pretty Clever.) For no very good reason, it's dedicated to the memory of Sandy Denny and published in the doubtlessly forlorn hope that Island Records will abandon their fucking stupid policy of deleting all her albums.

CAN'T BUY ME TRUTH

If you've been reading Jeff Suter's Periphery (and who does not instinctively scrutinise every misplaced comma of that wonderful new fanzine that will save us from ourselves come hell or high lethargy?) you'll also have been reading much outraged sub-Daily Getsworse stuff about the inctedibly stingy and unhelpful way in which the Department of Health and Social Security, having been given vast sums of money by the British government, refuses to hand it over to everyone who calls round whining for some pocket money to keep them in booze and cigarettes for the next fortnight. The ever-unperceptive Mr Suter has clearly failed to appreciate that the sums involved are so huge that, if the micro-mandarins of the DHSS were not as hard-eyed as they are, he would be forking over something, like 90 percent of his income in tax and the National Debt would have grown so enormous as to not merely boggle his imagination but cause it to give up altogether.

Still, all this is just by the by, for I come not to praise the DHSS or even to bury it, but (hopefully) to prove that it is possible to fill a fanzine with writing about one's non-fannish life.

I work (all right, all right -- I'm employed) in the London Business Cases offices of the Legal Aid section of the DHSS, a section which at present falls under the aegis of the Supplementary Benefits Commission (a policy-making body which by the time you read this will have been disbanded to make way for something else, legal aid soldiering on more or less as before). Exactly why legal aid should have been attached to the DHSS in the first place is rather a mystery: although the interviewing techniques are much the same as those used by other DHSS personnel in deciding whether or not some-

one will get social security and the end result has to do with the handing over of money to the applicant (or almost, since it's the applicant's solicitor who ultimately collects on the deal), it should, considering its relationship to the Great British Judicial System, be more properly attached to the Home Office or, better, the Lord Chancellor's Office; and, just to complicate matters further, the administration of the legal aid fund lies with the Law Society, the solicitors' "trade union", to whom all our reports are submitted and on whom the final decisions rest. All that aside, however, the legal aid scheme is founded upon the upliftingly (I mean that, oddly enough) idealistic principle that no one should be denied the right to pursue or defend civil litigation in the higher courts of the British judiciary simply through an inability to pay the costs involved, and in practice results in all those who apply for such help submitting to a test of their financial means to determine whether or not they themselves are able to contribute anything. This in the main involves offsetting their regular and necessary annual expenses (tax, national insurance, cost of travel to work, rent or mortgage repayments and dependants' allowances, to name the most basic) against their gross annual income to arrive at what's known as the "disposable income" figure, which leads to one of three things: either (in 50-60 percent of the cases) it falls below the preset lower limit, in which case they have all their costs met for them; or (25-30 percent of the time) it falls somewhere between the lower and upper limits, in which case they have to make some contribution to the costs of the case (the size of the contribution depending upon how much the DI exceeds the lower limit); or it can fall above the upper limit, in which case they're deemed too bloody rich for their own good and get no help at all (although in reality the applicant's capital (savings and such) is more often the cause of an "out of scope" determination; but I'll have more to say about this a bit later).

We're not, when engaged in this interviewing and assessing, at all interested in the legal aspects of the case and, indeed, are specifically barred from offering any opinion on them (not that we even have the expertise to do so anyway); all we care about is the money -- which, probably because of the word "legal" in our name, really rather confuses them. Already made nervous by the looming prospect of their litigation, they come into our offices expecting to be hauled over the coals by a panel of red-robed judges and pin-striped barristers and are instead confronted with a bunch of layabout junior civil serpents with long hair, patterned shirts, cord jeans, velvet jackets and fancy ties (at least, that's what I usually wear -- except for the tie, which I've managed to leave off for the past few months on the pretext that the weather is too warm for such nonsense....a pretext which has of course now lost whatever credibility it originally had) who seem blithely unconcerned as to whether they win or lose their actions and studiously ignore all their requests for advice. But (because it very often has some effect on their financial circumstances) it's nevertheless standard practice to ask them to tell us "something" about their litigation, and tell us they do, usually in the most interminably irrelevant detail you've ever heard, presumably in the hope that by such an outpouring they can win our inmost sympathies and materially affect our assessment of their means. (An essentially doomed hope because, plausible though their catalogue of woes might sound, we have to remember that we're hearing only one side of the story, and that the other party could have a quite different tale to tell. Deciding the truth or otherwise of a claim is the province of the judge, not us.)

And not only sob stories, either. During the mini-heatwave of May, I interviewed a woman applicant petitioning for divorce who turned up in a dress that could be described as only partially concealing at best and which, the way she wore it -- crossing her legs and arranging the side-split to expose as much thigh as possible and then leaning forward to allow me to look straight down her braless cleavage -- only barely qualified as that. (What she'd have done if faced with one of my female colleagues I know not, and nor did I wish to ask.) And, yes, she was attractive -- until she opened her mouth, proving herself to be yet another of a number of similar female applicants with whom I was saddled around that time, a type who, once you started

them talking, never seemed able to stop, wittering on and on about anything and everything in the most irritatingly whining voice imaginable and whom I thus dubbed "whining women" -- a term which I'm pleased to say, has now become a standard part of the office's unofficial jargon. (For the record, it's not only the women who whinge on so; we get moaning men as well, and by God they're so much more of a pain in the neck it's almost unbelievable.) In the face of such we can but maintain a bland neutrality in the hope that they'll sooner or later shut up and let us get on with our questioning -- but this can sometimes backfire, as was proved to my cost a few weeks ago when a woman (another petitioner for divorce...about half our applicants are either petitioning for or responding to divorce) I was interviewing literally broke and cried in front of me: an acutely embarrassing moment. Rummaging through her handbag for her handkerchief, she upset its contents all over the floor and I, leaping to retrieve them for her (old middle class chauvinist attitudes die hard in these parts), discovered amongst them a paperback edition of Michael Bishop's Stolen Faces -- a book which enabled me to calm her down by spending the next 15 minutes discussing SF with her.

From the ridiculous to the sublime, eh? Certainly, the people we interview do provide us with insight into the widest possible range of humanity, no one of them ever quite the same as another...except as regards their mode of employment. Back at the bottom of the first page I mentioned that I worked in the London Business Cases offices of Legal Aid, which means, simply, that we deal with self-employed people living in the London area. This might not sound like much to you, but it makes our assessment of their means much more difficult: whereas an employed person knows precisely what he'll be paid at the end of each month, the income of a self-employed one can and often does vary widely from week to week -- and so how, since we're assessing on an annual basis, projecting income and expenses forward for 12 months from the date of the application, can we accurately determine what such a person is likely to receive or spend in that period?

The answer, of course, is that we can't -- but, to paraphrase Confucius, we can always use the past, the accounts the applicant submits to the Inland Revenue every year, as a reliable guide to the future. Good in theory...except that many self-employed people don't make or present such accounts, or keep proper records, or even have much idea of their average weekly earnings, and in these depressingly frequent cases we have little option but to assume that they can earn much the same as someone employed in a similar or identical occupation and, after due playing around with whatever figures they do provide, manufacture a profit figure out of what amounts to not much more than thin air. Not at all a satisfactory method, I know, but the only way to check such estimates is to wait until the 12 month computation period is up and then review the case to find out what the applicant really did earn (often with a significantly different result). If they disagree with our assessment in the meantime, then tough -- the Law Society can challenge our determination but in practice very rarely does so, and if the applicant wants it revised then he'll have to prove we got it wrong in the first place....and how can he do that if he doesn't keep proper records or accounts?

Not that any records or accounts the applicant does keep are necessarily complete or accurate anyway since there's no guarantee that they'll contain details of all his income and expenses or, given the unscrupulous back-street accountants some seem to employ, that the formal accounts haven't been dressed up for presentation to the Inland Revenue. Carpenters and joiners don't buy themselves a new car every year, after all; music teachers are unlikely to spend that much on postage and stationery; no man would pay his wife quite so vast a salary just to do his typing for him...and so on. All of which does sound very much like a policy of suspecting everything and believing nothing, but then verification of every item of income and expenditure (particularly the latter) is vital to our work -- it's not enough for them to simply say they're paying such-and-such voluntary maintenance to their separated wives, they've got to prove it by producing the relevant bit of paper -- and in this respect their bank statements can often tell you more than you'd think, and

sometimes more than they themselves think, or even would like you to think, I've lost count of the number of people I've interviewed who've sworn blind that they're only earning an average of (say) £80 per week when the credit entries on their statements reveal income of two or three times as much -- all of whom have of course expressed complete surprise and bewilderment when this was pointed out to them, and in one case quite seriously responded with the claim that she had no idea what the figures could possibly have represented. (I mean, have you ever heard of a London tour guide earning an average of £500 a week? It later transpired that the tourist work was just a device for getting laid by rich foreigners. No wonder her husband was suing her for divorce.) Never mind those who swear even blinder that they've only got the one account when the statements for it have entries quite clearly identified as transfers to and from some other account entirely (my wife's, they'll say smugly, forgetting that in non-matrimonial cases the resources of a husband and wife are aggregated; or my friend's; or my cousin's; or...why, we ask with an evil grin, and watch them flounder); or those who claim that some or all of the money in their account isn't theirs at all, but that they're just looking after it for a friend or a cousin or.... On very rare occasions these desperately unlikely stories can actually be proved, but most of the time they're simply trying it on, and get themselves put out of scope on capital.

Generally, the larger the sums involved, the more cautious we have to be, particularly in view of the possibility of deprivation. One of the regulations of the Act under which the legal aid scheme operates provides that capital which an applicant somehow gets rid of at a time when he knew he'd be involved in litigation falls to be taken into account in our assessment regardless of the purpose for which it was used, unless there are very strong grounds for deciding otherwise. Repayment of a loan from a friend, they'll say, or I gave my daughter and her husband the deposit to buy a house, or I crashed my car and had to buy a new one (a tremendous excuse, that one -- at least he had the grace to blush when I asked him to identify which of the credit entries on his bank statements represented the cheque from the insurance company).... Prove it, we'll reply, and if they do provide any verification it's usually so flimsy or so obviously invented that it simply confirms us in our original suspicions -- on one occasion I received a letter purporting to come from an applicant's friend, supposedly confirming repayment of an outstanding debt, which had quite clearly been written in the applicant's own hand. The stupid buggers must think we were all born yesterday. (But then some of the applicants probably were -- one of the whining women I once interviewed, a part-time actress who (I kid you not) also doubled as a debt collector, produced records which included such esoteric items as wallpaper and catfood, and seemed vaguely astonished when told that these would not be allowed as legitimate business expenses. Not to mention the clod who was very precise about his income but completely ignorant of his expenses, as though the idea that not all of his earnings could be regarded as straight profit had somehow passed him by.) But the real liars are the ones you never suspect at the time, who cloak their guile and deviousness with a facade of such apparent honesty and openness that even we are taken in -- which can mean trouble: a few days after my return from Navaccon 10, for example, I'll be reinterviewing a man whom we know from subsequent allegations lied through his teeth at the original interview and has thus laid himself open to the possibility of serious criminal charges. (And he's defending a charge of domestic violence, too....)

All of which doubtless makes me out as some cruel and heartless monster who doesn't believe a word I'm told and couldn't care less about the applicants and their problems. Not so; considering the trauma they must be experiencing -- because most people only ever go to court once in their lives, and usually more or less against their will -- an informal manner, a vague smile and a halfway sympathetic demeanour are of some importance to our work (to coax them into giving us the information we need, if nothing else), but they are not and must never be any more than a superficial pretence, for if we were to become in any way involved in a particular case (no matter how dire-sounding its circumstances) our judgement would be wrecked and a fair assessment of the applic-

ant's means rendered impossible. And this problem, the necessity of maintaining our "distance", is not unique to us; it's common to all those offices of the DHSS which have frequent dealings with members of the public, and in spades: to our five interviews per officer per week, each one of their officers has to cope with a dozen or more. Ultimately, of course, we become used to it -- mainly and unsurprisingly because the more people we see the more inured to them and their problems we become, remembering them only as a name and a reference number if we bother to remember them at all. We have to laugh at them, insult them and call them liars behind their backs because it's the only way in which we can retain our sanity and because in truth the job is something of a grind anyway (and not just because of the applicants -- if you thought some of the foregoing sounded complex, you haven't heard the half of it. Let me tell you about these great thick volumes of rules and codes and tables which govern our every word and thought and deed....but on second thoughts, no; I'd only send you to sleep). Day after day after day after.... public spiritedness and a sense of duty and all that WASP crap can only be stretched so far, after all, and sooner or later it's stretched so far that it breaks completely -- like Peter Finch in Network, we just run right out of bullshit. And since we can't talk back to our senior officers, we can certainly take it out on you hapless bastards....

It's no bloody wonder, therefore, that the DHSS has such an awful reputation amongst the public at large, and in truth I felt much the same as Jeff Suter about it before I was transferred in on promotion from the Department of Trade (I didn't want the transfer, but I couldn't otherwise have had the promotion) -- but then an enforced change of perspective on something always was more effective at modifying someone's opinion than any amount of reasoned argument. Except, of course, that our office is rather a special case....which is what fills me with horror, because when my name goes down on the list for a routine intra-Department transfer after my standard three-year stint here is up it's on the cards that some prize clown in personnel will in his wisdom decide that I'm ideally suited for a similar interviewing job in a real social security office. And, Jesus Christ alive, I'd rather not go on wearing a tie and acting smarmy for any longer than I absolutely have to -- three years is enough for anyone, thank you very much. For all my overuse of the collective pronouns "we" and "our" in the above, I don't actually identify with my job; I'd be quite happy to stay home all day and do nothing as long as the civil service continued to pay me, but since the silicon chip hasn't yet made me redundant I'll obviously have to stay slumped at my tatty old metal desk for some time to come, listening to whining hard-luck stories from a seemingly endless stream of legal aid applicants and dreaming idly of the day when the TLS asks me to write SF criticism for them on a regular basis.

The future probably isn't quite as bleak as that. But there are times when it seems like it.

This issue's Quote Of The Issue comes from IAN MAULE: "Does catching Legionnaires' Disease mean you end up talking like Dave Kyle?"

Although in all honesty the above isn't the best throwaway line I've heard in the past few weeks -- that came in a three-cornered interchange about someone Almost Famous at a recent BSFA collation session, but wouldn't make much sense if printed out of context. And if I were to reprint the entire dialogue I'd have to identify the participants in order for that to make sense, too -- and then in all probability end up staring down the barrel of a libel action (or some reasonable facsimile thereof). And legal aid is not available for actions involving libel or slander....

There's just room on this page to mention that the deadline for TAFF votes is 1 December 1980, and thus fast approaching as you read this. The man to vote for is of course GARY FARMER (because I'm one of his nominators), but even if you don't agree you should vote for he or Stu Shiffman anyway. All right.

SEND IN THE CAV

Real letters, yet -- far more than I actually expected to receive, but also far too many of them devoted to discussion of Apocalypse Now and the Vietnam War. This was probably due to the fact that most of them came from American rather than British fans, the latter having read "Out Of The Rising Sun" on its original appearance in FEAPA and hence seeing no need to respond again. Not that I have any right to complain, of course....but here's one person who delivered just the sort of comment I was looking for:

Chris Priest "The 'confessional nature of the major article in Napalm In The Morning 1 is such as to raise creepy feelings of identification, with the exception that I am actually embarrassed to remember that I once made model aircraft. Even being 14 doesn't excuse it. Do you realise that I made more than fifteen models before twigging to the fact that the reason they kept breaking was because they weren't supposed to be flown?"

****Let you feel even more embarrassed by it now that I've gone and printed the above, eh? But then if you will deliver yourself into my hands by such means I can hardly pass up the opportunity to raise a chortle.... Chris also had some comments to make about GUFF, as follows:

"For the last three and a half years I've been dropping hints in the direction of Australia to the effect that they might like to invite me back. An expenses-paid trip there is a prize indeed, and given that GUFF now exists -- and is actually a fairly lucrative fund, with much support -- seems to indicate that any fan who doesn't take the opportunity to run for it is a bit slow-witted. As one of your official nominators, I naturally wish to see you win it, but at the same time I hope other people will enter the race because I'd like the Australian experience to be shared by many. Three and a half years after my own visit there, I'm still charged up by the experience."

****Part of which is of course now rather academic, but at least it gives me the chance to assure everyone (and particularly the Australian voters) that I do now have competition, in the form of Malcolm Edwards -- a piece of surely redundant information, since only the completely blind can have failed to notice the GUFF ballot riding with this issue. You are instructed to vote as if your life depended upon it....

That's the second bloody comment I've ended with a row of Significant Dots; bad style, what? Michael Ashley also wrote about GUFF, but if I were to print an extract from his letter it would look a bit self-serving. So here's someone else entirely about, you guessed it:

Bill Carlin "I don't think that anyone who's seen Apocalypse Now would accuse you of becoming a mindless cultist of the Hitch-Hiker breed; expressing strong opinions inspired by such a momentous film seems only to be a case of giving credit where credit is most definitely due. I've heard so many wankers ejaculating with enthusiasm over Star Trek: The Motionless Picture at the Thursday night meetings of FOKT that it was a pleasure to read your thoughts about what must be one of the greatest studies of modern warfare ever filmed. The only thing that bothers me when Apocalypse Now is discussed is the way in which the phrase "flawed masterpiece" keeps getting kicked around. I can see its attraction, since it's a nice, handy, pre-packaged label that can be applied to the film without much thought as to where its flaws lie -- but can anyone point to a masterpiece that is without fault?"

****Good point, not least because the answer has to be "No". Still, here's some more on the same subject:

Jimmy Robertson "I was impressed by every aspect of the film, not least Coppola's treatment of the subject. As you rightly say, his war is the universal war and not specific to Vietnam -- but I must say that the impression I gained from the film was the omnipresent aura of insidious fascism which began to surround Willard as his (non?) relationship with

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Kurtz developed. I was genuinely frightened by both performances."

Graham Ashley "I feel that your attack on Marlon Brando is just a little
86 St James Road too simple, as though you were merely picking up on what
Mitcham other critics have written. I'm sure that his illusion of
Surrey CR4 2DB composure and "sanity", which you view as a failure to act,
is evidence for Coppola's argument that for certain people
there comes a point when the war ceases to be a means to an end and becomes an
end in itself. Willard came to this realisation as he read through Kurtz's
dossier on the journey up-river into Cambodia, and the military authorities
who sent him had obviously realised it a good deal beforehand. Kurtz had
learned to live with the concept of war; indeed, he actively embraced it.

"But it's good to see that the film moved you enough to devote an entire
issue to the subject, and you do make some pretty valid comments on it. How-
ever, I feel you miss the point in berating Kramer Vs Kramer for daring to win
this year's Best Picture Oscar, since this shows not so much the stupidity of
the voters as the inherent weakness of any awards system which has to judge
items that are totally dissimilar. I haven't seen Kramer Vs Kramer, mind you,
but I feel that an intelligently made film about divorce and its effects upon
children is artistically every bit as valid as one about the effects of war;
where the Oscars fall flat on their faces is the impossibility of objectively
comparing the two. To say that one is better than the other is more or less
arbitrary. For you, it comes down to postulating that biggest means best: be-
cause Apocalypse Now has a vastly wider scope then it must be better than a
more introverted film like Kramer Vs Kramer, which is clearly nonsense."

****I stand duly rebuked -- but you did say that you hadn't actually seen
Kramer Vs Kramer, didn't you?

Avedon Carol "Having seen both versions of Apocalypse Now, and being
4409 Woodfield Road the only person on my block to have recognised (a) Bill
Kensington Graham and (b) my old acid trips come to life on the
Maryland 20795 silver screen, I rather enjoyed your comments about it
USA despite the fact that helicopters hold no particular
fascination for me. Be that as it may, I refused to see

Kramer Vs Kramer on the grounds that it's difficult for me to sympathise with
a twerp who ignores his wife and child for years and then thinks he's a better
parent just because he began to pay attention to the kid when she left."

****Just for the record, I've now seen the other version of the film to which
I referred last time -- but on a screen the size of a postage stamp, which
thus robbed it of all its glamour and impact. Poot. (Changing the sub-
ject, Avedon remarked that she'd been expecting me "to look like some sort
of strange ape-like creature who'd just learned to walk erect" but then
"Langford showed me his latest issue, with a photograph of you in it, and
you turned out to be sort of, well, almost, um, pretty -- and that's re-
markable anywhere in fandom, isn't it?" to which I shall make no reply at
all.) But then not everyone agrees with us about it anyway:

Trevor Briggs "The first movie ever to capture the overall insanity, the
6 The Plains totality of war'? Crap! The first movie ever to capture the
Crescent Road megalomania of a director and the ineptitude of an overrated
Chingford actor. Demonstrating the effects of war on the individual is
London E4 6AU the only way yet used to successfully bring this message ac-
ross. M*A*S*H and Catch-22 both did it much more successfully
than Apocalypse Now, both using exaggeration and overstatement but, unlike the
latter, pulling it off. Then, too, their humour sharpened the message -- the
reason why Dr Strangelove was so much more memorable and effective than its
look-alike contemporary Fail-Safe. I agree that Kramer Vs Kramer is no Oscar-
deserving masterpiece, but I feel it is a much better film, being successful
in its intended purpose, whereas Apocalypse Now stands up only on its photo-
graphy."

****I'll agree that Dr Strangelove is more memorable and effective than Fail-
Safe, but I do disagree with you about the superiority of it, M*A*S*H and
Catch-22 to Apocalypse Now because as far as I can see the three tell us
only what we already know: that the best way we can cope with the grinding

terrors of war (or any other major crisis) is by laughing at them, thereby attempting to belittle them. Black comedies they undoubtedly are, but as demonstrations of the real effects of war they fail completely. All in all, though, I suspect we'll just have to agree to disagree, and talk about the real Vietnam War instead:

Joyce Scrivner
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"I found it very interesting that you, Paul Kircaid and Dave Cockfield could conclude that Apocalypse Now captures the totality of war when you can only ever have experienced it via the silver screen or the printed page.

"The problem with the Vietnam War is that for me it didn't consist of helicopters and napalm. It was two cousins in Vietnam, a boyfriend as a CO, a brother in Europe and arguments over "limited warfare" in secondary school. It was SDS rallies at college, a small blue button with a dove and the words "April 24 SMC" on it, the schools being shut down after the Kent State killings, and long arguments with my father. The TV reports were some of it, but the draft lotteries stand out more than Khe San, as does the final airlift from the Saigon embassy. I can still recall images of burning Buddhist monks and the fallen statues of Premier Ky; the odd-sounding names of the villages around which various battles were fought have been forgotten.

"But I don't believe in the reality of the war I saw any more than the war you and Coppola have recorded. The reality would be the sum of the pieces, not the individual view."

****(Ah, nostalgia! I can still remember the LSE students' march on the US embassy in London in 1968....) Which last statement almost contradicts everything you said before it, since by it you imply that each individual viewpoint is as valid as all the others. I saw the Vietnam War from a distance and have lingering adolescent fantasies still warping my judgement; you saw it up close and have the memories of impassioned student involvement still warping yours -- how can either view be deemed more "correct" than the other? But talking of the TV reports and student involvement and such:

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USA

"I don't think it's true that the TV coverage of the war was the sole factor in moving the American people against it, or that the student protests had no effect. The two phenomena were, however, linked, both growing and feeding each other. The intensity of the protest was I think helped by the war-in-your-living-room coverage, and that was

partially propelled by the continuing national debate, which affected the journalists involved as much as anyone else.

"And the impact of the protest did grow. The initial demonstrations of the mid-60s are not the same as those of 1970, when the bombings of Cambodia were revealed and the Kent State killings occurred. My own university was closed down by rioting and the section of the town it was in lost virtually every pane of glass in the same fracas, leaving an animosity between townies and gonnies that was still felt when I studied there ten years later. Further, one of the campus's main buildings was lost in a fire at the same time, and after ten years arson is still suspected. But if it hadn't been for the TV coverage the story could have been very different; I don't think it's so easy to separate it from the protest.

"One telling thing about Vietnam War movies made here, though, is that they are all about Americans in Vietnam, and their sufferings there. That the people of the country might have gone through some tribulation while their homeland was being torn apart is never seriously considered, except perhaps in crowd sequences. And I think that's an important example of the fruitlessness of the war, even above war in the whole: my people never really knew the people they were fighting for, and they never really knew us. We both expected each other to react, to believe, to feel the same, and when that line of reasoning failed we wrote each other off as simple forces, as masses of people that had to be dealt with but weren't important enough to be considered human."

Harry Warner
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USA

"I've read over and over the theory that television coverage had an effect on the course of America's involvement in Vietnam. One problem is the fact that the war dragged on longer than any this nation has fought since the American Revolution, so either revulsion resulting from the television coverage wasn't very effective in forcing

the withdrawal or television eventually spared us from our very own Thirty Years War. I might also point out that in a sense television coverage of the Vietnam war wasn't too much different from the newsreel coverage of World War Two. The newsreel footage was several days older than the Vietnam pictures by the time we saw it, but it was enormous on the giant movie screen and changed frequently. We didn't see it but many of us went to the movies two or three times a week, seeing a different newsreel in each theatre.

"Then there's the theory that battlefield coverage really began a dozen miles from Hagerstown. The Civil War battle of Antietam south of here was the first time that photographers in any war had arrived at a battlefield before things had been tidied up. Of course there was no coverage of the actual fighting, because it was necessary to sensitise plates just before exposure and then develop them immediately, and this wasn't practical with bullets flying about. But some of the pictures taken a day or so after the fighting were gruesome to an extreme, were widely published in the periodicals of the day, and copies of them were displayed in store windows in big cities. Last winter I attended a slide lecture by an area resident who had spent years studying the photographs taken at Antietam, and those taken a year later at Gettysburg, disclosing previously unseen details by new enlargements from the original plates, tracking down the exact geographical locations where the photographers stood, and even discovering how certain corpses were dragged around the battlefield for inclusion in different pictures because they happened to look particularly bad. Even in the black and white reproductions, I started to feel sick at the stomach after seeing so many gaping wounds, contorted faces and ripped-open bodies enlarged to life-size."

***Horrific though the above sounds, I must confess that I find it rather fascinating, albeit in a deliberately perverse way -- and in point of fact it's just the sort of fascinating "off-trail" thing that I like to find in otherwise perfectly sober (or perfectly drunk) fannish fanzines. Reverting to your earlier paragraph, however....I don't think that World War Two newsreels can really be equated with TV coverage of Vietnam because (at least on the example of the British wartime newsreels I've seen in various TV documentaries on the subject) their aims were entirely different. To put it crudely, the newsreels were intended not so much as reportage but as propaganda for the folks at home, reassuring them of the inexorable progress of their just and noble war effort and spurring them on to greater sacrifices in its name; whereas the TV coverage, although it might have started out in a propagandist vein, the draggingly inconclusive nature of the war (and, as Jim Meadows pointed out, the influence of the gathering storm at home upon the journalists in the field) eventually brought a very different attitude -- one of cynicism and despair -- into being. Then, too, there was the difference in presentation: while the newsreels could be edited and dressed-up to (deliberately) tell only one side of the story (and a very incomplete one side at that), the TV reports came (more or less) straight from the battlefields, telling it (again more or less) as it happened, with vanishingly few frills. Not to mention the work of such photojournalists as Donald McCallum and Tim Page, who could only ever tell one side of the story anyway, and that the most depressing side: a seemingly endless stream of pictures of dead and wounded US soldiers, with only the occasional picture of a dead VC to demonstrate that their enemy was not completely invisible -- none of which would have done much to inspire the folks at home.

But here's another extract from Harry's letter, in an equally fascinating vein:

"I don't know a lot about helicopters, and I don't know how a helicopter enthusiast feels about autogyros, but for a while it looked as though Hagerstown might become the autogyro capital of America. An inventor named Umbaugh per-

sueded the local Fairchild airplane factory to produce some test models of the autogyro he had developed for marketing to upper income persons as a sort of family aircraft. It was supposed to be capable of landing and taking off on the average suburban home site, would come down safely even if the motor failed, and would sell for only about twice the price of an expensive American-made auto. However, the thing never went into mass production here. The official explanation was that Fairchild found it impossible to produce the autogyro in the numbers Umbaugh had decided was the maximum for his marketing purposes, but my own suspicion is that the thing couldn't have coped with windy weather. Umbaugh eventually shifted to a factory in the midwest which produced a fair quantity of the gyros and the last I heard they were undergoing changes of some sort. All that's left of the adventure in Hagerstown is a picture of an Umbaugh autogyro on the wall of the bus terminal.

"Anyway, there was a brief period a long while ago when I went through a model airplane building enthusiasm. If you think I'm exaggerating about it being a long while ago, let me dramatise the time-span: these weren't plastic models. They were wooden models: each kit contained enough balsa wood and plans to create, if you had the patience and few special knives for cutting the stuff, a featherweight model that could actually fly. But I was always clumsy with my hands and balsa model planes aren't ideal for a person in such circumstances."

****And thus, by dint of clever editing, we return to where we started. Bet next issue's letter column isn't quite as cleverly constructed, though.... But here, apropos nothing at all, are a few last-minute comments from Harry Andruschak:

"I was browsing through the OED during lunch hours at JPL looking for new words with "APA" somewhere in them, but all I've found is that the US form of government is a "kakistocracy", meaning government or rule by the worst."

****And Gary Mattingly:

"Just wait until Ronnie Raygun becomes president over here and everything turns into movies and his advisors die and he can't come up with the answers and I think Shirley Temple should be prez so she can tap her way up and down the White House steps."

****And by the time you read this we'll all know the answer to that one....

Room now for but the WAHFs: Neville J. Angove, Richard Faulder, Alan Ferguson, Rune Forsgren, Steven Green ("I've smelt this first issue several times and I can't find anything in the least endearing about the odour; can I claim a refund?"), Nic Howard, Terry Jeeves, Chris Lewis ("Your list of probable Hugo winners was very similar to mine, but I suppose you know that you only guessed two correctly."), Ken Mann, Geoffrey Mayer, Phil Palmer (who wrote a long and fascinating plot-analysis of Apocalypse Now, but alas too long to quote), David Redd ("I wouldn't object too strongly if Clarke won a Hugo since he said he wouldn't write any more novels because he'd run out of ideas -- and he deserves an award for that."), and Rochelle Reynolds (to whom I have owed several letters for rather too long a period to recall exactly without feeling extremely guilty about it). Last stencil dated 23 October 1980: I'm off down to the Maules in New Malden to get this duplicated in time for November. The next issue will (ha!) be out some time before the end of the year. Bye.

This has been Napalm In The Morning,
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