

“Mr. President . . .”

“What is it, Pat?”

“Mr. President, there’s a terrible demonstration going on outside.”

“Oh, there’s always a demonstration going on outside, Pat.”

“Yeah, but Richard, this one is completely out of control.”

“Well, we have people to take care of that, they’ll do their job, you do your job, and I’ll do my job.”

“But Richard, you don’t understand, they’re storming the White House.”

“Oh, in that case I’d better call out the Third Marines.”

“You can’t, Richard.”

“Why not?”

“It is the Third Marines!”

“Ohhh . . .”

The Show the Pentagon Couldn't Stop



A FEW YEARS AGO, the United Serviceman’s Organization—better known as the USO—sponsored a series of television commercials in which GIs walked along rice paddies or picked their way through the desolate battlegrounds of yesterday. Over these stark visuals came the plaintive voice of a soldier: “Doesn’t anybody care?” The scene then changed to a joyous USO dance with smiling soldiers and pretty girls. The message was clear: if you give generously, the boys overseas will get euphoric enough on popular music and short skirts to forget their dirty job.

In 1972, this sort of thing seems hopelessly out of date. The GIs’ nightmare cannot now be so easily calmed; the circumstances which make for their loneliness cannot be so easily wished away. Most Americans simply want to forget that soldiers exist, for they call

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“Nothing could be finer
Than to be in Indochina
making money.
Hating is a hobby
When you’re in the
China Lobby —
life is sunny.”

“When Nixon goes
to Peking, hey,
And many jump
with joy
But the word
comes from
the horse’s mouth
And the horse
is in Hanoi
And it says
set the date
And you say
set the date.”



“Well, Red, it looks like we’re in for a beautiful game here today.”

“Terrific, yeah.”

“Both these teams are in tip-top condition.”

“Thank you, Red, for that interesting and colorful commentary. Meanwhile, back on the field, there’s a temporary time out . . . a halt in the action while the dead and wounded are being dragged from the playing area.

“Red, I see Lt. Colonel Billy Slocum down there on the field on the radio, and I think he’s gonna go to the air for the next play, I think he’ll look for the bombers. And there they are! Wow, look at that Red, will you? From the carrier U.S.S. Enterprise, 4-F Phantom Jets coming up over that hill. Up at 12 o’clock, silver, gleaming in the sunlight, in formation.

“Down they come now. there go the 20 millimeter cannon, there go the rocket pods, there go the anti-personnel

fragmentation bombs, and I count 12 water buffalo down and kicking. They are going up . . . there they go around again.

“They’re coming in again for a second pass, we’ll watch for it. here they come. Low, coming in, here it is, it’s napalm . . . wow! Right on top of the 101st, there are penalty flags all over the playing area. That’ll be an error, that’ll be charged to the U.S.S. Enterprise, seventh time this month.

“Now, they’re going into a huddle, we’ll watch them. They’re breaking out of the huddle now, and they’re going into orderly withdrawal and lying on the field motionless is Lt. Colonel Billy Slocum. That’ll be a fragging penalty for the 101st, Red.”

“Definitely definitely.”

“Absolutely. They’re moving out, neat, tidy, in orderly withdrawal. And here’s the hotline battlefield tally for the Viet Cong: 117 dead. 212 wound-

ed. For the 101st casualties were: light to moderate, as usual. Red?”

“I know that President Nixon would have loved to have been here . . . himself today, in person to throw out the first grenade in this sporting event.”

“Oh, absolutely, Red. absolutely.”

* * *

“We’ve come here . . . for the same reason we’ve been traveling for the last eight months around the United States, to perform outside of military bases, to support the service women and men who are organizing against the war and demanding their rights. The material for the show was taken from GI newspapers from among the 75 GI newspapers that are out around the world. It’s political vaudeville, it is not raising any new issues—

Nothing could be finer
 Than an overflight to
 China, ain't that funny?
 You'll hear me singing,
 Bomb another city
 today . . . oh, yeah,
 Bomb another city today!"



"It's so nice to be a member of the military class. Our lives the same in peace time as in war. You see, the natives cook and drive for me; They work all their lives for me. You see, servants aren't a problem anymore."

it's just simply saying to the people in the service, we recognize that the majority of you are against the war, don't like the kind of oppression you're experiencing, and we support your struggles. How they struggle and in what direction is not up to us to say, to direct, to teach or anything like that, . . . that is their job, but we support them."

* * *

"I'm really curious to know . . . I mean, you all are not actually on Vietnamese soil, right, I mean it must be very abstract for you, what the effects of an attack carrier have on the war. What is it that started you all thinking, and how did you come to understand the role that an attack carrier plays?"

"I suppose everybody always knows, but they can rationalize anything away

. . . I don't know, for me it started about a year ago. I started waking up, you know, I lost my innocence, and, once you do that, once you awaken to these things that are happening around you, you can't go back to sleep again."

"Well, like you read the polls, and people want us to get out of Vietnam, and you see the polls getting higher and higher every week but yet we aren't out, you know, and how can you rationalize this. You have to question it."

"People over here, uh, have the same problems as the GIs all across the States and there wasn't anything to do about it, nobody have anything together. So, it started out in March and April, with about four or five active duty GIs and two people that used to be in the service. And eventually we had our own place, and we have a newspaper now. And basically, we're a support group, we . . . any GI that has any hassles like with the brass or,

or he's getting, you know, messed over in any way, we support him, we have a lawyer that's working with us . . . military lawyer . . . we have actions around incidents, like when a black soldier at one of the Marine bases here was busted for a very racist law, where he couldn't give the black power salute or the dap, which is a form of a handshake the blacks use in the mess hall, and he did it, and he was busted for it, and we had lots of action on that, demonstrations and picketings, and eventually he was acquitted."

* * *

"They just want you to be a little robot. You wind . . . they wind you up and they want you to do the job that you're supposed to do, they don't want you to be an individual. Any time you are an individual, they slap you around till you get back in line again."

F.T.A. (From Page 29)

up images of death and desolation and national chaos which this war has brought. Like a patient with a terminal disease, their continued existence is both frightening and embarrassing.

Because the psychology of the USO no longer speaks to what ails today's American soldiers, a new group has sprung up. It is Jane Fonda's "FTA," a "political vaudeville show" which has toured Army bases at home and abroad over the past two years and which is now the basis for a new movie of the same name.

Produced by Free Theatre Associates (that is, Jane Fonda, co-star Donald Sutherland, and director Francine Parker), the film stars, you might say, the cast of the FTA road show—namely Fonda, Sutherland, Len Chandler, Jr., Pamela Donagen, Michael Akimo, Peter Martinson, Holly Near, Paul Mooney, and pianist Yale Zimmerman. You *might* say it, but you would probably be wrong, for this is a movie to which the industry categories do not really apply.

It consists of segments of the show, as performed on bases throughout the Pacific Rim (Japan, Philippines, Coral Sea), interspersed with conversations between the cast and the audience. In format, it is vaudeville, ranging from zany sketches—GI humor the likes of which never worked its way into old Morten Lewis movies—to anti-war statements, through ballads and poetry.

"Foxtrot-Tango-Alpha?" the cast would ask as it toured army bases over the past two years. "NO! FUCK THE ARMY!" they shout, and the audience—GIs, WACs, officers, wives, children, and whoever cares to view it—roars with appreciation. It goes on from there, through the poignant story of a young draftee to a sardonic view of the battlefield seen as a televised sport event complete with blow-by-blow narration.

Politically, the show/film focuses on the dehumanization of GI life and links it to the military's sexism and racism. Jane Fonda elaborated on the theme recently by relating a conversation she'd had with a soldier. "Before I went in," he told her, "I thought of my girlfriend as someone I loved and wanted to marry. Now I find myself thinking of her as a piece of ass."

While crooning the words to "Tired of Bastards Fuckin' Over Me," Fonda and the other FTA women do a mock can-can to show GIs how they are taught to treat women the way the military treats GIs. Fonda recalls that FTA "spent months talking to soldiers



about what goes on in basic training, the purpose being to strip away from the human being, who is going to have to follow orders, the ability to see other people, of another sex or color, as equal, because if they could, they

would ask questions—they wouldn't be able to peel skin off live Vietnamese women, and all the other horrors."

FTA touches briefly on the situation of WACs and raises an issue not widely understood outside the service. In interviews, WACs tell of their horror upon realizing that their primary responsibility in the war effort is to "service the servicemen." After induction they are urged to obtain birth control pills courtesy of the army, and advised that any abortions needed would be provided free of charge without the necessity of informing a girl's parents.

To a degree, FTA is pitched to a black audience. Director Francine Parker has said that she found the average black soldier "twenty times more politically astute" than his white counterpart, which comes across in the film.

Rather than just individuals fighting a common enemy, black soldiers, it seems, think in terms of the community, and the black race, rather than just as individuals fighting a common enemy. One soldier in the film says that "the only place a black man should fight is where he's being oppressed, and I'm not being oppressed in Japan, I'm not being oppressed in Vietnam, and I'm not being oppressed in Pakistan. . . . and I'm not going to Pakistan. I'd go to jail first." It is not an isolated opinion.

Like Joe Bonhom in "Johnny Got His Gun," today's GI—black or white—knows that the killing he is part of will not "make the world safe for democracy." At one point in the film, a GI desperately explains how, at the very moment he was hearing Nixon on the radio announcing that there were no nuclear arms in Japan, he himself was loading them. "I loaded them myself!" he cries.

The GIs want the American people to know what is happening overseas, to know what their lives are like. "Take this movie back and show it to those people in the Midwest!" one boy shouted to Jane Fonda. GI wives begged director Francine Parker to "tell the American people to get us out of here!"

What began as "Free the Army" has now become "Free the Americans" as well—free them from delusion and official deception which America, more than the GIs, has swallowed. ■

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