

Jarhead: A Marine's Struggle to do Anything at All

We have recently hit the era of the Gulf War movie. The first of its kind, Jarhead is a new military story, a war film sans war. While the subject of the film, Anthony "Swoff" Swofford and his fellow marines of STA [pronounced: stay] are in a war zone there are never actually sequences of war. There is a lot of images of Marines patrolling, a good number of shots of the oil wells burning, but no war.

I understand that the film is based on the memoirs of Anthony Swofford, who did serve in the Marines in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. I also understand that the book is a very well written account of the time that Swofford spent there. The movie, however, is not.

While the cast of the movie is stellar, Gyllenhaal and Jamie Foxx among others, it is the film itself that left me feeling a bit bored.

After many jokes about masturbating, including one scene depicting Swofford, played by Jake Gyllenhaal, masturbating in a bathroom stall, the viewer is left feeling a bit lost. The idea about the Marines that I gathered from the film was that they were a rowdy bunch of cowboys and crazies who loved to masturbate and pretend to have large-group sex with each other in front of a news camera. I know that this is not true. The Marines are a group of some of the most elite soldiers in the world who fight and die for their country. Yet in the movie I saw more Marine weapons pointed at other Marines than actually pointed at the enemy.

The story itself is the same as most war movies. A boy joins the marines, struggles with the rigorous training and hazing of the unit, but eventually fits in. A war starts, and the unit goes to war. They fight, usually a man in the unit dies, and they return home with something haunting their collective conscience forever. Only in Jarhead, all I saw was the Marines waiting for war.

I believe that Swoff put it well when, after hearing that the war had ended, he looked down at his M40A1 Sniper Rifle and said something along the lines of: "I never even fired my gun."

If what the director, Sam Mendes, was trying to do was convey the boredom that the marines felt waiting for the war, it worked; I was bored through the whole movie.

Grade C-/D+

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